An Introduction to Indian Philosophy

Christopher Bartley



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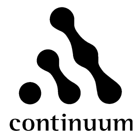
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For my wife Loretta, with love

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Contents

Introduction: Some Types of Indian Religiosity

This book attempts an overview of some of the topics, themes and arguments with which Brahminical Hindu and Buddhist Indian philosophers were concerned between the second and twelfth centuries A.D. It seeks to describe a variety of very different world-views. It aims to explore a variety of different mentalities, rather than to evaluate them or to ask whether they are true. It begins with some general considerations about the background to the different philosophical schools and tries to explain the origins of the fundamental separation of mentalities into the enduring-substance ontologies propounded by Brahmins and the event ontologies, repudiating real permanent identities formulated by the Buddhists. In broad terms, we see a dialectic between the two mentalities: one asserting the primacy of *Being* and the attendant concepts of substance, universal property, essence and the individuality of entities with persisting identities, and the other that understands the world primarily as consisting of ephemeral *beings* in a temporal process of becoming: events, complexes, change. According to the first view, states of affairs are produced by interactions between stable continuing entities, including enduring selves. On the second, the world is an ever-changing flow of events, and what we treat as individual entities are convenient abstractions out of relational complexes. We ourselves are no less conditioned than the things in the world with which we are involved. The first outlook has it that one fundamentally is in some sense a soul or substantial self, a further fact over and above one's experiences. In short, there is a difference between you and your life. This is precisely what is repudiated by the second outlook, according to which there are just life histories. There is no permanent 'real me'. Terms like 'Self' are convenient abbreviations for the ways in which embodied persons function in the world. The different ramifications of this mentality are explored in the chapters about Buddhism.

I am not apologizing when I say that this book is a survey of some of the Indian traditions. The field is vast and there is so much to be explored. It is to be hoped that readers are stimulated to consult more specialized works and read the original sources so as to form their own views. Suggestions about further reading are to be found at the end of each chapter.

* * *

In classical India, philosophy was understood as contributing to human well-being by freeing people from misconceptions about themselves and the world. Ultimate well-being was conceived as some sort of fulfilment outside the conditions of space and time. Philosophies, as well as religious traditions, understood themselves as paths to that final goal.

Where the religious contexts of those who engaged in critical, reflective and argumentative philosophy are concerned we have to reckon with a tremendous variety of beliefs and practices. Neither 'Hinduism' nor 'Buddhism' are really homogenous. It is difficult to know where to begin: you can always go back further. In the course of the second millennium B.C. the Aryan migrations into north west of the sub-continent introduced the Vedic religious culture and the four-fold hierarchy of *varṇas* (Brahmins, Warriors, Farmers and Servants) that was superimposed on the indigenous system of *jātis*. It appears that originally the ritual cult was concerned with the propitiation by offerings of the many deities in the Vedic pantheon. Their favour thus secured would yield mundane and supra-mundane rewards. Rituals performed by members of the Brahmin caste were understood as yielding benefits for both the individual and the community. But there developed an outlook that the continuation of the cosmos, the regularity of the seasons and the rising of the sun, were not merely marked or celebrated by ritual acts but actually depended upon ritual. What the rituals effected was too important to be left to the choices of ultimately uncontrollable capricious divinities. So rituals came to be thought of as automatic mechanisms, in the course of which the mention of the deities' names was but a formulaic aspect of the process. The relegated gods existed only in name. The Brahmins unilaterally declare themselves the gods in human form. From the point of view of the individual, the benefit of the ritual was understood in terms of the accumulation of merit or good *karma* that would be enjoyed at some point in the future, in this or a subsequent life perhaps in a superior sphere of experience for those with sufficient merit. The notion of *karma* is basically a recognition that one's actions have future consequences for one. But the consequentiality extends beyond this life. The

idea is that a deliberately performed intentional action generates a residue (good or bad) that remains with the agent until future circumstances occur that are appropriate for its fruition in the agent's experience. *Karma* does not determine the future directly: rather, it lies in wait. It is *karma* that *personalizes* and propels individuals through a series of births in the here and now.

The notion of repeated births (*saṃsāra*) is a presupposition shared by Brahmins and Buddhists. Everyone agreed that the process of rebirth goes on and on, is fundamentally unsatisfactory and is to be escaped from. Whatever the quantum of good *karma* accumulated by an individual, it will still become exhausted. Felicity is always temporary. Release or liberation is always understood as irreversible freedom from rebirth. This freedom from rebirth, the ultimate goal of religious praxis, is what is called by Brahmins '*mokṣa*' or '*mukti*', and '*nirvāṇa*' by Buddhists, although as we shall see their understanding of what it means is very different.

For there to be rebirth and the anticipation of future benefits, Brahmins regarded it as essential that there be a permanent and stable identity (*ātman*) to which the *karma* pertains, so that the instigator of the performance could be he who enjoyed its consequences. The status of this 'self' (*ātman*) in the natural hierarchy of being was maintained, and hopefully improved, by the spiritual purity of the persona with which it was associated. The system of castes, whether the endogamous and commensal *jātis* that have a monopoly on specific trades and professions or their interpretation in the *varṇa* framework, is a hierarchy determined by spiritual purity. The hierarchy accords with and expresses the cosmic order that is both natural and right (*dharma*). Each caste has its own set of duties (*dharma)*. The Brahmins insisted that it was better to do one's own *dharma* badly than that of another well. *Dharma* is not thought of as a universal morality applicable and accessible to all. Rather it is a matter of what F. H. Bradley called 'my station and its duties'. The Brahmins' purity derived from obedience to the rules bearing upon every aspect of life that are encoded in texts prescribing social and religious duties (the *Dharma-Śāstras*). The orthodox Brahmin cannot choose his own values. The rules chart a safe passage through a universe populated by dangerous forces that are looking for an opportunity to occupy the body and mind of those who are negligent of their observance. Spiritual purity is purchased at the price of moral heteronomy. Daily ritual, as well as personal and social duties (*dharmas*), confers meaning on the life of the orthodox 'twice-born' Hindu. It is clear that the mainstream Vedic orthodoxy perpetuated by lineages of what are known as '*smārta*' (traditionalist) Brahmins is more than a matter of personal or shared religious

allegiance. For much of its history India has been politically fragmented into hundred of small kingdoms. In the absence of a centralized monarchical institution, the integrating factor promoting harmonious coexistence, agreed expectations, shared values and trust between different states throughout the sub-continent was the Vedic *religio* with its established rituals, social norms and Sanskrit language. Hence the anxiety occasioned by departures from the common identity conferred by Vedism, which were potentially subversive of good order.

Some aspects of the philosophical articulations and defences of this mainstream orthodoxy (*smārta*), especially against the manifold Buddhist articulations of their basic insights that there is no genuine permanence and no persisting self, are described in the chapters on Mīmāṃsā ritualism and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realistic metaphysical pluralism.

As well as ritual practice, there is the discipline of *yoga,* whose philosophy is described in the chapter on Saṃkhya-Yoga. Yoga aims at calming the mind so that it may become fit for a non-discursive awareness of reality as it really is. This begins with control of the body and develops mental discipline through meditation, with a view to freedom from determination by natural causality. Obviously such practice is consistent with participation in ritual acts, but it may be detached from that form of religiosity in the case of those who have become convinced that ritual practice is ultimately ineffective as a means to final salvation, understood as freedom from repeated births in different spheres of experience.

The model of the human psyche is that what is called 'mind' (*manas*) co-ordinates information received via the sense-faculties. For the most part we are passive in relation to sensation and the feelings it evokes. In addition, mental attention is often diffuse and not really focused. When mind and senses are not controlled, we are living purely on the level of sensation. The ideal is to discipline the senses by bringing the *manas* under the control of what is called *buddhi* (usually not very helpfully translated as 'the intellect') and to focus attention on one's inner identity (*ātman*). Such a person is called '*yukta*' or integrated:

> When a person lacks understanding and his mind is out of control, he is subject to the senses that are like bad horses of a charioteer. But when a person has understanding and his mind is under control, his senses are subdued like good horses. [*Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3.5–6]

> When the five sensory cognitions and the mind are stilled and reason (*buddhi*) is steady, they call this the highest state. They call *yoga* a firm grip on the senses. One is then free from distractions. [ibid. 6.10–11]

> He should sit still as a piece of wood. Collecting his sense-faculties, he should focus his mind steeped in meditation. He should not hear with his eyes nor see with his eyes. He should not long for the objects of the sense-faculties. He should focus the mind, within for it wanders in and out of the five doors and has no stable foundation. [*Mahābhārata* 12.195.5f.]

A quite different outlook says that understanding or insight alone is necessary for salvation. This is the view of those individuals (including Gautama the Buddha) who have chosen the path of renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) of the everyday social relations life of the adult male householder with his duties of wealth creation, procreation and the performance and patronage of rituals. Renouncers have come to the conclusion that the interminable performance of rituals cannot conduce to ultimate well-being. They think that rituals and *yoga* may be helpful preliminaries, but they are insufficient in themselves for freedom from rebirth, which can only be approached through concentrated meditation leading to insight into one's true identity. *Saṃnyāsa* is formalized through a special type of initiation ritual for the removal of inherited caste status. Initially a trend subversive of social order, renunciation became integrated into the mainstream religion and was classified as the fourth stage of life (*āśrama*) subsequent to those of celibate studentship, being a householder and retirement or 'forest-dwelling'. Renouncers are homeless wanderers committed to celibacy. They possess only a saffron robe, begging bowl and staff. They are dedicated to achieving liberation from rebirth through *insight* into the nature of a soul that is a reality beyond space and time, and the ultimate source of all reality (the *Brahman*).

Nevertheless, renunciation has always been controversial and for some people renouncers are objects of fear and suspicion. There is a resistance to the idea that anyone should quit the established social order and the rituals commanded by the Vedas, and go it alone. So some traditions hold that performance of social and ritual duty is mandatory: what one should renounce is desire for the results of the rituals. That outlook is clearly expressed in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

The philosophical expression of the renunciatory path is to found in the chapter on Advaita-Vedānta.

A quite different mentality has it that whole-hearted and deeply felt devotion (*bhakti*) to a personally conceived deity elicits divine favour (*prasāda*) and ultimate well-being in heaven. The self is understood as an essentially dependent servant of God whose fulfilment is to be found in enjoyment of the divinity. This is not a late development, but is apparent as early as the

Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad: The Lord supports this whole world consisting of the perishable and the imperishable, the manifest and the unmanifest that are linked together. The soul who is not the Lord is bound because he is the experiencer of the fruits of *karma*. Having known God, he is released from all bonds. [1.8]. The one God rules over the perishable and the soul. By contemplating him, by uniting with him and in the end sharing his way of being, all the material world ceases. When one has known God, the bonds are destroyed, when the afflictions (*kleśa*) have dwindled away, there is an end to birth and death [1.10–11]. The articulation of the devotional outlook is the subject of the chapters about Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Dvaita Vedānta.

As well as what is generally recognized as mainstream orthodox *smārta* Brahminism, there are traditions that base themselves not on the Vedic corpus but on divinely revealed scriptures called Tantras or Āgamas. These are monotheistic ritual cults, whose praxis includes forms of yoga and meditation. The deities are Śiva, the Goddess and Viṣṇu, who do not feature prominently in the Vedic pantheon. Tantrism is the subject of the chapter about the Śaiva and Śākta cults.

Further reading

A. L. Basham, *The Wonder that was India: A Survey of the Culture of the Indian Sub-Continent Before the Coming of the Muslims*, is an interesting and comprehensive overview.

Alexis Sanderson, 'Power and Purity', (1985) is seminal, as are some of the articles collected in Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection*, (1991). For a translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, see Johnson (1994). For the *Upaniṣads*, Olivelle (1998) provides an informative introduction, texts, translations and illuminating annotations. What is called the *Mokṣa-dharma* (composed while Buddhism was developing) in the Mahābhārata Book XII offers an insight into the spiritual outlook of the Brahminical renouncers. There is a text and translation in Wynne (2009).

Gavin Flood, *Introduction to Hinduism*, is easily the best of the countless introductions.

Louis Dumont (1980), 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions' has been very influential. Dumont argues that the key to understanding Indian religion is to be found in the dialogue between the householder and the renouncer. The latter, he says, represents the closest Indian equivalent to the European notion of the individual as the bearer of values. The monograph, *Homo Hierarchicus*, is a fundamental contribution to Indian sociology. Olivelle (1993) is about the four stages of life. Olivelle (1996) translates texts bearing on Renunciation in Hinduism.

On devotional religiosity see Hardy (1983), which is unlikely to be superseded. J. A. B. van Buitenen's 'On the Archaism in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa' (Chapter XIX of Rocher (1988) applies M. N. Srinivas' theory about the process of 'Sanskritisation' to *bhakti* religion.

Foundations of Brahminism: Vedas and Upaniṣads

1

Chapter Outline

There are four collections known as Vedas, composed during the period of the Aryan migrations into northern India (1990–1100 B.C.). They are called the *Rig-Veda*, the *Sāma-Veda*, *Yajur-Veda* and the *Atharva-Veda* and are regarded by mainstream orthodox Hindus as an authorless, timeless and infallible source of knowledge about religious and social duties in harmony with the natural universal order (*dharma*). Their eternal sound-units are held to have been discerned and composed by seven primordial 'seers'. Priestly Brahmin families preserve the different traditions of recitation of the sacred sounds. The basic component of each of the four *Vedas* is its collection (*saṃhitā*) of verses (*mantra*), evocative of the divinities whose sonic forms they are, which are used in rituals. Attached to each collection are the '*Brāhmaṇas*' which prescribe, describe and elucidate the purposes of the sacrificial rituals performed by Brahmin priests and their householder patrons. They include explanations of the meanings of the ritual actions, and posit correspondences between aspects of the rites and features of the cosmos including the social structure and the human body. It was believed that ritual performance orders, sustains and perpetuates the universe, creating new time and ensuring the regular succession of the seasons. There are also the '*Āraṇyakas*' ('Forest

Books') that speculate about the 'inner' meaning of the rituals and are closely associated with what are called *Upaniṣads*. They were composed by people who had probably renounced the actual performance of ritual. Their view is that the mental re-enactment of the meaning of the ritual is just as effective as its overt performance. These fascinating compositions contain many reflective, *poetic* explorations of fundamental metaphysical questions. The best way to appreciate them is by immersing oneself in the originals, translations of which are readily accessible.

Metaphysical questions are to be found in the hymns of the *Rig Veda*. These hymns celebrate and propitiate gods mostly associated with natural forces. Their cosmogonic hymns speak of the gods such as Indra and Varuṇa establishing inhabitable space and creating sustainable order out of chaos. They were used by Brahmins in rituals whose aim was the perpetuation of the cosmos. The questions about Being – Why is there something rather than nothing? Where did it all come from? – feature there, if not prominently. One line of thought says that there is an original One, beyond being and non-being. Another idea is that Being (*sat*) arises from non-Being (*asat*). Since nothing comes from nothing, 'non-Being' probably means a chaotic, undifferentiated state in which are *no things*, no names and forms, no entities and kinds, no structures or organizing principles. 'Being' would then be a cosmos of differentiated, identifiable, organized realities. This is apparent from the somewhat later *Chāngogya Upaniṣad* 3.19.1: 'In the beginning this world was just non-being. What now exists came from that. It developed and formed an egg . . .' The speculation is rationalized in the sixth chapter (6.2.1) of the same work: 'In the beginning, my dear, this world was just being (*sat*), one only without a second. Some people say, In the beginning, this world was just non-being, one only, without a second. From that non-being, being was produced. But how could this be? How could Being be produced from non-Being? On the contrary, in the beginning this world was just Being, one only, without a second'.

In this intellectual milieu, the Being of beings is understood as the source, basis, support and final cause what there is. It is the foundational 'something else' out of which the world of entities emerges or unfolds. According to this outlook, the cosmos has immanent order and purpose (*dharma*) independently of any meanings that human beings might create for themselves. In the major *Upaniṣads* (composed between 800 and 400 B.C.) this ontic support is called the *Brahman* – the Absolute, timeless, unconditioned unlimited substance that needs nothing else in order to exist. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*

Upaniṣad (BAU) 1.4.10 says,

> 'In the beginning there was only the *Brahman*, and it knew only itself (*ātmānam*), thinking, "I am the *Brahman*". From that, everything came into being.'
>
> It is the imperishable principle (*akṣara*), the thread upon which all realities are woven. [BAU 3.8]

The Brahman lacks nothing, which is why it is sometimes said to be blissful. The Brahman is the essence of whatever is real. The Brahman is the truth. This Reality behind and underlying all contingent and finite realities is sometimes characterized as the One, beyond the categories of being and non-being that apply to what falls within the sphere of our experience.

Naturally, there was also speculation about what human beings basically are. A possible view is that we are just parts of the physical cosmos, assemblages of the same elements that make up the waters, wind, fire and earth. The original meaning of the word '*ātman*' (usually translated as 'self' or 'soul' – but which also often means the identity or essential nature of something) is 'breath' (*prāṇa*), a word for the vital functions of seeing, hearing, speaking and thinking. But there developed the view that we are not reducible to physical factors and functions. The principle of reasoning is that if something can treat a process as an object to itself, it cannot be something that emerges from or is an aspect of that process. In this light, *ātman* is no longer the breath, or any one vital function or the vital functions taken collectively, but that which is the source of vital functions, that which underlies them and explains their reason for being.

> Soul's secret name is, 'the reality of what's real' for the real constitutes the vital breaths and the soul is their essence. [BAU 2.1.2]

Ātman acquires a meaning approximating to 'essential principle' or 'soul'. The concept is that of an essence and is different from than what we ordinarily mean by self (so we have to be careful about translating the term) or person, that is to say, a subject of experiences or a thinking, willing, feeling, acting individual. Crucially, soul becomes regarded as intimately associated with or participating in the fundamental reality:

> This soul is the honey of all beings, and all beings are the honey of this soul. The radiant and immortal person in the soul and the radiant and immortal person who is an individual self, they are both the soul. It is immortal. It is the *Brahman*. It is

> the whole. This soul is the lord and king of all beings. As all the spokes are fastened to the hub and rim of a wheel, so to the soul are fastened all beings, all the gods, all the worlds, all the vital breaths, and all these people. [BAU 2.5.14–5]

The cosmos is thought of as a single whole that has essence and this is what is called the *Brahman*. Individual selves, microcosms versions of the cosmos, too have essence and this is what is called *ātman*. If essence is indivisible, the Brahman equates to *ātman*. The *Brahman* and *ātman* come to be understood as two sides of the same coin.

Another portion of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* puts it like this:

> Explain to me the Brahman (Reality) that is plain and not hidden, the *ātman* that is within all. The soul (*ātman*) within all is this soul of yours.
>
> What is the soul within all?
>
> You cannot see the seer who sees. You cannot hear the hearer who hears. You cannot think of the thinker who thinks. You cannot perceive the perceiver who perceives objects. The soul within all is this soul of yours. . . . That is what is beyond hunger and thirst, beyond sorrow and delusion, beyond old age and death. When they know this soul, Brahmins cease to desire sons, wealth, other worlds of experience and adopt the mendicant life. [BAU 3.4–5]

Shortly afterwards there is the question of on what the cosmos depends, the thread running through everything, the inner controller (*antar-yāmin*) of this world and the next, as well as all beings, who controls them from within. It is said that when a person knows what the inner controller is, he understands reality (*brahman*), he knows the worlds, he knows the gods, he knows the Vedas, he knows the spirits, he knows the soul, he understands the *whole*.

> This soul (*ātman*) of yours, who is present within but is different from the earth [fire air, wind & other physical features], whom the earth does not know, whose body the earth is, and who controls the earth from within – he is the inner controller, the immortal one. . . . This soul of yours who is present within but is different from all beings, whom all beings do not know, whose body is all beings, and who controls all beings from within – he is the inner controller, the immortal. . . . This soul of yours who is present within the breath but is different from the breath [from speech, from sight & other sensory and cognitive functions], whom the breath does not know, whose body is the breath, and who controls the breath from within – he is the inner controller, the immortal. . . . That is the seer who cannot be seen, the hearer who cannot be heard, the thinker who cannot be thought of, the perceiver who cannot be perceived. There is

> no other who see etc. It is this soul of yours who is the inner controller, the immortal. [BAU 3.7]
>
> About this soul one cannot say anything. It is incomprehensible for it cannot be grasped. [BAU 4.2.4]
>
> This soul is the Brahman – this soul that constitutes perception, mind, breath, sight, hearing, earth, water, wind, space, *dharma* and *adharma* – this soul that constitutes everything. [BAU 4.4.5]
>
> The breathing behind breathing, the sight behind sight, the hearing behind hearing, the thinking behind thinking – those who know this perceive the *brahman*, the first and the last. [BAU 4.4.18, cf Kena Up. 1.2]
>
> It is the soul that should be seen, heard about, reflected upon and contemplated. When the soul is seen, heard about, reflected upon and contemplated, the cosmos becomes understood. [BAU 4.5.6]

It is recognized that there is a sense in which a person's desires and actions make him what he is. The person who acts in accordance with desires is caught up in a chain of actions and consequences, and is repeatedly born in different spheres of experience. But as for the person whose life is not determined by desires and their satisfaction, because he lives for what really matters:

> The Brahman he is and to the Brahman he goes. [BAU 4.4.6]
>
> Such a one is at peace, in control, unperturbed, patient and focussed for he sees the soul in himself and he sees all things as the soul. [BAU 4.4.23]

Finally, some passages from the sixth chapter of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that will exercise a considerable influence on later thought, especially on the Vedāntic systematizations of the Upaniṣadic teachings. Uddālaka Āruṇi offers to teach his son Śvetaketu how one hears what has not been heard before, how one thinks what has not been thought of and how one understands what has not been understood. He says that the teaching is:

> From one lump of clay one understands the nature of anything that is made of clay – the modification being a name, a taking hold by speech, while the truth is that it just clay. (Ch.Up.6.1.4)
>
> In the beginning there was just Being (*sat*), one without a second. . . . Being reflected, 'May I become many. Let me become productive.' It generated heat. Heat generated water. Water generated food. (Ch.Up. 6.2.1 and 3)

> That divinity thought, 'Let me diversify names and forms by entering those three creative principles by means of the living self, and make each of them threefold'. (Ch.Up.6.3.2)

> Being is the source of all these creatures. Being is their support and Being is their foundation. (Ch.Up.6.8.4)

> Bring me a fruit from the banyan tree.
> Here it is, Sir.
> Cut it up.
> I've cut it, Sir.
> What do you see?
> Tiny pieces.
> Cut one of them up.
> What do you see?
> Nothing.
> You cannot see the finest essence here, but it is because of that finest essence that this great Banyan tree stands.
> Whatever is the finest essence, *that* is the identity of everything, *that* is authentic reality. *That* is the soul.
> That is what (*tat*) you (*tvam*) are (*asi*)'. (Ch.Up.6.12)

Further reading

For Vedic Hinduism and the contents of the Vedic corpus see Jamison and Witzel (2003). This is accessible online via Professor Witzel's website.

Rig Vedic hymns are translated in Doniger (2005).

The *Upaniṣads* can be found in Olivelle (1998). There is also an OUP paperback that just has the translation.

Essays II, V–X in van Buitenen (1988) have all been influential. Chapters I and II of Halbfass (1992) are thought provoking about the 'question of being' in India.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Does it really make sense to suppose that the complex cosmos has a single source? Is 'being' uniform?
2. Why might people find ritual pursuits unsatisfactory?

2 Buddhist Origins

Chapter Outline

Gautama Śākyamuni, who would become known as the Buddha, 'the Enlightened One' probably lived in the period 450–400 B.C. Early Buddhism rejects the notions of the *Brahman* and *ātman*, insisting that there are no enduring, substantial realities. It teaches the essential temporality of beings. Things are always changing. Nothing really lasts. There are no essences, no immutable natures and universals, characterizing entities and running through reality as a whole. It says that ritual religion is pointless and rejects the authority of the Vedic scriptures. The attitude that self-advancement through ritual practices is possible is a form of what the Buddha calls 'greed'. It says that the caste hierarchy, held by the Brahmins to be a natural fact, and the associated deontological morality is nothing more than a system of social arrangements. The Buddhist outlook denies that the cosmos has a single source and goal. If it has a reason for being and an explanation for its dispositions, it is just so that sentient beings may experience the fruits of their *karmas*.

Buddhists and Brahmins recognize that there are persons who remain similar over time and whose futures are conditioned by their deliberate and intentional decisions and actions. They differ about whether a basic principle of identity is required to explain the continuity of such individuals. We might depict the Buddhist as arguing that psychological continuity is enough for

personal identity. The Brahmin position is that psychological continuity presupposes personal identity and therefore cannot constitute it. (Neither seriously entertains a physical account – the body dies and is burned.) But the disagreement goes deeper than questions about personal identity. It occurs in the context of much broader opposition between two mentalities. The Buddhists deny that there is anything that basically remains the same, that there are any permanent stable identities at any level (*nairātmya-vāda*). There are no real universals or kinds, no essences constituting enduring objects, no eternal sounds or meanings. There are only processes of momentary events (*kṣaṇika-vāda*). The Brahminical metaphysic posits Being as prior to and underlying the sphere of beings and becoming. The Buddhists say that there are just essentially temporal beings in an ultimately impersonal flux.

Buddhist philosophers adhere to an ontology of processes and events (*nairātmya* – non-substantiality), rather than one in which enduring substances are the ultimate constituents of the worlds. They typically reduce whatever is conventionally considered as a stable substance to a stream or sequence of occurrences. The Buddhist claims that thoughts purporting to be about persisting entities that undergo qualitative changes without loss of identity can be reductively analysed into descriptions couched in terms of sequences of instantaneous or momentary events. They reject any categorical distinction between enduring substrates and the properties, essential and non-essential, of which they are the bearers. Rather, they understand reality in terms of temporary collocations of basic factors (*dharma*). Individual personality is understood as a causally regulated flux of mental and physical occurrences. What makes for the continuity of a person's life is just the occurrence of a series of suitably interconnected physical and mental events. What is called 'self' is not a substantial persisting entity distinct from the contents of experiences but a construction, convenient but mistaken, out of those contents. The Buddhist maintains that the human subject is an essentially temporal (*kṣaṇika*) succession of phases that somehow imputes permanence to itself.

So when the Buddhists say that there is no self or soul, they are doing more than denying that there is a permanent and stable inner principle in human beings, selfish obsession with which is the source of all our woe. The anti-substantialist mentality denies that reality is constituted by stable and reliable structures grounded in a single source. It denies that either the totality or individual human lives have any intelligible purpose or meaning outside themselves. There is no God who has a purpose for the world and for

human lives. This may sound negative, but that was not the intention. Rather, understanding life in these terms is held to be liberating. Much that one had worried about does not really matter. One will not live forever. Perhaps it enables people to 'let go' and enjoy life while they can. Above all it is meant to empty our heart of hatreds, greed and bitterness and to engender a spirit of compassion, friendliness and generosity.

Gautama Śākyamuni, who became known as the Buddha or Enlightened One, lived around 450–400 B.C. in the far north east of India. Born into a royal family, he like many others at the time became disillusioned with the frustrations, superficialities and conventional expectations of normal social life. Renouncing society and the ritual religion with its eye on future benefits, he went from home to homelessness. He tried to live as an ascetic, practising severe austerities, in the manner of contemporaneous Jaina renouncers, with a view to acquiring spiritual insight. Finding that this did not work, he espoused the 'middle way' – a path of morality and meditation, between comfort and asceticism. The doctrine is also understood as the middle way between eternalism and nihilism. The former says that identity is permanent. The latter holds that universal impermanence and non-substantiality preclude ethical consequentiality. The Buddhists thought that eternalism was amoral in that it treats the soul (*ātman*) as outside the sphere of values. Moreover, the soul is not what we normally mean by a person. Nihilism just denies that there are bearers of moral responsibility and recipients of consequences. Buddhists think that a morally significant stream of information and dispositions (*saṃskāras*) continues after the death of the person. The stream's future is not the future of that very person. Still, we should care about its future and strive for its ameliorization in the interests of general well-being.

The Buddha discovered the truths (*dhamma*) about the cosmos. The Buddha's teachings and spiritual journey are reported in the collections of discourses found in the *Sutta-piṭaka* of the Pāli Canon of scriptures. After centuries of development by oral transmission, the Pāli Canon was committed to writing in Ceylon during the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmanī (97–77 B.C) at the Council of Ālokavihāra. These are the scriptures recognized as authoritative by all Buddhists, whether belonging to the Theravāda traditions found in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia, or to the Mahāyāna ones belonging to parts of India (until the twelfth century A.D.), Tibet, China and Japan. Of the differences between the two families (many of which are cultural) one might mention that the Mahāyānists ascribe quasi-divine status to the many Buddhas and accept texts additional to the Pāli Canon as authorities. It is

sometimes argued that some of the alleged doctrinal differences – e.g. the Mahāyānists emphasize compassion and insight, worship the Buddhas and hold that the path to enlightenment is long and difficult – are not really differences at all but belong to the shared heritage.

The basic principles of the Buddha's teaching are expressed in 'Four Noble Truths':

1. All mental and physical phenomena are ultimately unsatisfactory (*duḥkha/ dukkha*). This is the eternal round of existences (*saṃsāra*). Universal unsatisfactoriness is attributed to the impermanence and non-substantiality of all conditioned entities, including human lives. In truth, there are no enduring essences or identities. Selfhood is a fiction that the fluxes of thoughts and desires conventionally called persons superimpose upon themselves. Attempts to cling to what are in reality impermanent objects, states of affairs and relationships are bound to end in suffering.
2. The second truth is that there is a causal explanation for the arising of unsatisfactoriness in terms of '*thirst*', a metaphor for desire and attachment, and *ignorance* of the way things really. Unenlightened actions are motivated by greed, hatred and delusion. Some fundamental causal relations are formulated in the doctrine of interdependent origination *(pratītya-samutpāda)*. This is basically a Humean view, holding that causation is just a matter of Bs usually following As. There are no causal powers separate from what actually happens in succession. Causal continuity within subjectless streams of experiences does not require an internal principle but is organised by the co-operation of twelve factors forming a circle rather than a chain, sometimes put like this:

   > Ignorance conditions volitional actions. Volitions condition states of mind. States of mind condition mental and physical phenomena. Mental and physical phenomena condition the five senses and the co-ordinating mental faculty. Those six condition one's mode of interaction with the external world. That mode of interaction conditions sensations. Sensations condition desires. Desires condition attachments to objects. Attachments condition the process of becoming (a life). A life conditions a new birth. Birth conditions old age, death and suffering.
   >
   > This is the arising of the mass of suffering.

This account of causation is held to account for the organisation of a stream of karmically conditioned experiences so that it can be reborn in another foetus as the start of another life. The idea seems to be that a bundle of selfish energies coheres as a field of forces. To the question of whether the one who is born is the same as the one who dies, the tradition replies that it is neither the same nor different.

Pratītya-samutpāda will be interpreted by Nāgārjuna as meaning that everything comes to be in dependence on causes and conditions. Nothing is self-sufficient. There are no essential forms reproducing their own kinds and no causal powers over and above what actually happens.

3. There is potentially an end to suffering, called *nirvāṇa* or *nibbana*. This is the end of the series of unsatisfactory existences through the extinction of the fires of possessiveness, antagonism and delusion that generate rebirth-causing actions. The fires metaphor is no accident. It is more specific than the idea that everyone is burning with desires that only generate more experiences and more desires. It alludes to the three fires which the Brahminical householder was obliged to keep burning and which symbolised his life, responsibilities and attachments as a social being. It represents the endless repetitions that characterise life of the householder. The tradition is reluctant to say anything positive about *nirvāṇa* as a post-mortem state. Whatever it involves, there are no persons to experience it. It is perhaps sufficient to say that from the point of view in terms of this life it is the extinction of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion and the end of the afflictions (ignorance, selfishness, desire for sensory gratifications, obsessive attachments and an exalted opinion of oneself).
4. There is a path to the cessation of suffering: the eightfold path of morality and meditation.

The Four Noble Truths are the key to enlightenment. But hearing is not enough. They have to be acted upon, and this is where the path of morality and meditation comes in. The path is said to consist in: right views, right thoughts, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Right views and thoughts are mind-purifying wisdom or insight into the fleeting and unsatisfactory nature of existence; right speech, action and livelihood are moral conduct; right effort, mindfulness and concentration are understood as meditation. Buddhists insist that virtue is necessary for the cultivation of meditation and insight. Intention (*cetanā*) is understood as determining the moral quality of an action. Morality consists in deliberate abstention from murder, theft, sexual misconduct, false speech, slander, harsh words, frivolous talk, covetousness, malice and false views. Right livelihood would preclude such occupations as arms-trading, dealing in drugs and alcohol and butchering animals. Meditative concentration (*samādhi*) is the achievement of tranquillity through avoidance of distractions, and by suppression of sensory activity. Emphasis is placed upon mindfulness or exercising control through constant self-awareness of one's physical, mental and emotional states.

The path is the 'middle way' between the self-indulgent and ascetic lives, neither of which lead to release from the desire-fuelled series of existences.

What is needed is the elimination of the basic defects of craving, aversion and delusion.

The Buddha insisted that it is the intention (*cetanā*) with which an action is performed that determines its ethical quality. He tells his followers to *cultivate attitudes* of non-violence, honesty, friendliness, gentleness, compassion and generosity. The right sorts of actions will follow. He did not provide a rulebook stipulating particular types of ethical actions (although his followers did for the monks) or an ethical theory. There are some basic principles: don't kill, don't steal, don't tell lies or indulge in malicious gossip, avoid sexual misdemeanours and intoxicating substances. These are universal – not caste-specific – in that they have moral application to everyone: I do not want to be assaulted and can reasonably conclude that no other sane person wants to be. There is a trend of thought running through Hinduism that there may be ways of acting that do not generate *karma*. Representative here is the idea, promoted in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that since it is deliberately purposive actions that generate *karma*, actions done for their own or duty's sake without a view to the advantage of the agent will not generate *karma*. The Buddha thought that *karma* was inescapable by sentient beings. The eightfold path recognizes this. It is sometimes argued that the outlook is consequentialist, holding that it is overall states of affairs that have moral value. Some ways of life have better overall consequences than others. The view is that although the future of the stream that is your life is not *your* future, you still have reason to care about *its* future, as well as that of all other streams. The Buddhist path aims to promote general happiness. Since there really are persons, it is not open to the objection that it ignores the separateness of individuals and their integrity.

Moral conduct attenuates afflictions (*kleśa*) that prey upon the mind. These weaknesses are familiar ones: ignorance in the sense of indulging oneself in self-serving fantasies and believing whatever it suits one to believe; the sheer selfishness that sees itself as the centre of the world; desire for sensory gratifications; neurotic obsessions that divert attention from what matters; an exalted opinion of one's significance in the scheme of things. The texts catalogue other impediments to spiritual progress, two of which we shall mention briefly. There is attachment to rituals, central to the Brahminical way of life, and vows, the latter being personal undertakings and commitments such as the harsh austerities that Gautama had found useless. I think that the word '*kāma*' often moralistically translated as 'lust' or 'sensual desires' was probably more specific and refers to those rituals performed by Brahmins that

will produce yield benefits in this world for those patronizing them. The Buddha thought that all ritual performances were at heart self-interested, not to say a waste of time and effort.

The texts are rich in descriptions of and prescriptions for meditational practices, aiming at the control and ultimately the cessation of discursive mental activities. The Buddha described his path to enlightenment as an ascent through a hierarchy of four stages of meditations (*dhyāna*) which, far from involving ascetic rigours, are pleasant experiences:

> Then indeed, having eaten enough, having got my strength back, free from desires, free from unhelpful matters, I reached the first stage that is accompanied by thought and reflection, which is produced by discrimination and consists of joyful happiness and remained there. But this pleasant state did not put my mind at rest.
>
> Stilling thought and refection I reached the second stage that is inner tranquillity, a focussing of the mind on one point, free from thought and reflection, consisting of joyful happiness that is born of concentration and remained there. But this pleasant state . . .
>
> I reached the third stage when I became detached from joy, indifferent to pleasures and pains, attentively mindful and knew physical pleasures. But this . . .
>
> From abandoning bliss and abandoning pain and thanks to the disappearance of cheerfulness and depression, I reached the fourth stage that is beyond pleasures and pains, the quintessence of equanimity and attentiveness. But this . . . [Majjhima Nikāya 1.247]

This is a typical account of meditation involving successive stages. It did not put his mind at rest because it stopped short of revealing the fundamental truth that our experience is unsatisfactory because we fail to realize that there are really no individual identities and that everything is impermanent.

Meditation also has a positive goal, that is to say, the cultivation of the helpful (*kuśala*) states called the *Brahma-Vihāras*: friendliness, compassion, joy and equanimity. There is also what is called 'meditation on the four infinities' that aims at the suppression of imagination and conceptual thinking. There is a fourfold hierarchy of stages: the stage of the infinity of space, the stage of the infinity of perception, the stage of nothingness and the stage beyond conceptualization and non-conceptualization. Dwelling on notions of the infinite emphasizes the limits of conceptual thought, and undermines confidence in the capacity of our minds to grasp the nature of reality. I take what is called meditation on no-thingness to refer to a state in which one is not focused on anything in particular: a reflex of the realization that there are no individual identities.

Finally, morality and meditation are not understood instrumentally, as means to something different. Their complete realization is what enlightenment means. That is the *nirvāṇa* accomplished by the Buddhas. The person who successfully follows the Buddhist path is liberated while still alive.

No self

The early tradition raises queries about the coherence of the notion of the soul. Is it the same as experiences? Is it non-experiential in character? Is it the possessor of experiences? The first view reduces self to transitory states, but it is meant to be constant. The second is literally self-defeating. Such an entity could never have the awareness, 'I am'. The third view treats experiences as contingent properties that the self might lack. So in that case the self might sometimes lack the awareness, 'I am' [MahĀnidĀnasuttanta in DIghanikĀya II 67].

As an example of the sort of understanding of selfhood that the Buddha repudiates, let us look at *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 8.7.1:

> The soul that is free from evils, wrong, free from old age and death, from sorrow, from hunger and thirst, whose desires and intentions are ever realised, that is what is to be discovered, that is what is to be understood. When someone discovers that and understands it, he obtains all worlds and all his desires are fulfilled.

According to this Upaniṣadic outlook, the soul is the key to the meaning of life and ultimate well-being. The Buddha thought that the mentality to which such thinking belongs is basically self-interested. He undermines it by saying that there is no such thing as the soul: all we can say is that there are temporal streams of experiences and ethical consequentiality. There is no difference between you and your life – you are the same as your life-history. You do not go through phases: there is just a succession of phases. It makes no sense to ask, 'what if my early upbringing had been different?' because the question would be about another stream of experiences.

If what we call the person is the stream of thoughts, who is thinking them? The Buddhist view is that intrinsically self-aware subjectless thoughts are thinking themselves, as well as each other. They do not need illumination by consciousness belonging to a persisting subject. They form a continuous entity by knowing their immediate predecessors and successors. William James characterized a 'no-self theory' as follows: 'Each pulse of cognitive consciousness, each Thought, dies away and is replaced by another. The other, among the

things it knows, knows its own predecessor . . . saying: "Thou art mine, and part of the same self with me." Each later thought, knowing and including thus the thoughts which went before, is the final receptacle of all that they contain and own. Each Thought is thus born an owner, and dies unowned, transmitting whatever it realized as its Self to its own later proprietor' (*The Principles of Psychology*, Volume I, p. 339).

The early Buddhist tradition reductively analysed what we understand as persons into processes consisting of five impersonal components (*skandha*):

The body (*rūpa*)
Feelings of pleasure and pain (*vedanā*)
Sense-based perceptions of objects (*vijñāna*)
Conceptual thoughts (*saṃjñā*)
Volitions, inherited dispositions and habits (*saṃskāra*).

Neither singly nor collectively do these transitory factors constitute an enduring identity. There is no permanent self or person over and above the components. There is nothing that 'owns' successively occurring experiences. Feelings, perceptions, thoughts and volitions are all momentary events. There is no mention of consciousness purely as such. They do not recognize what is sometimes called 'the unity of consciousness'. There is continuity within a stream in that one event may cause the origination of another. The process must be characterized as one of successive replacements rather than one of change, because there is nothing that changes. A taste *sensation* may engender a *feeling* of pleasure and each may be registered by distinct thoughts. This complex may engender in the future a memory that causes a desire.

The term 'person' is but a convenient shorthand expression for talking about a causally connected sequence of events. We unenlightened beings make the mistake of supposing that what is merely a manner of speaking designates an enduring substantial self, an inner controller, an irreducible subject of experiences looking out on the world from a privileged perspective. It is attachment to this misconception that is the ultimate source of human woes. Buddhist praxis aims to eliminate the mistake. Belief in the soul leads to anxious self-concern, narrowness of vision, defensiveness, antagonism to others who are seen as barriers to the expansion of the ego and the perpetuation of the process of rebirth. The *Upaniṣadic* thinkers thought that the self was ungraspable, beyond language, so subtle as to be undetectable. The Buddha goes further. There isn't anything there. We have here a radical solution to the problem of human selfishness: there is no self to worry about.

It is apparent from the Pāli Canon that views about the nature of 'the Self' – what humans really are – were as multifarious during the Buddha's time as they are today. When fear of death perturbs the human spirit, we look for something to hold on to that will exist in the future – or perhaps it won't. Some may think of 'the self' in personal terms as the complex of experiences that lasts for a while, others may understand it as a transcendental subject that is exempt from worldly life and destined to exist for ever. It is this belief that there is some sort of lasting self that is one of the varieties of grasping that only lead to distress.

An early and popular scripture, the Snake *Sutta* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, echoes the *Upaniṣadic* ethos:

> The unenlightened person thinks of the body as his, as what he is, as his Self. He sees feelings as his, as what he is, as his Self. He sees perceptions as his, as what he is, as his Self. He sees thoughts as his, as what he is, as his Self. He sees volitions and habits as his, as what he is, as his Self. He regards what he has seen, heard sense known experienced, pursued and considered as his, as what he is, as his Self. And there is the attitude, 'The world and the soul are the same, and after death this is what I shall be – permanent, enduring, eternal, immutable and I shall exist like that forever.' This view he regards as his, as what he is, as his self. . . . But the enlightened persons does not think in these terms and so is not *anxious* about what does not exist.

The point seems to be that identifying anything finite and transient, such as a stream of embodied experiences, as a persisting personal identity (an obstacle to enlightenment called '*sat-kāya-dṛṣṭi*') is bound to lead to unhappiness and anxiety. Thoughts and feelings just happen. In reality there is no one to whom they happen. There is just a 'bundle of perceptions'. The more sophisticated understanding of oneself as a transcendental subject, really exempt from worldly life and destined to exist forever, only leads to worry too. Will it really continue? The enlightened person does not think in terms of either of these egocentric frameworks, and that is the key to living without anxiety, without obsessive self-concern. The key to happiness is not just altruism, but the realization that there are no selves. The radical nature of the vision should not be underestimated. Returning to the Snake *Sutta*:

> When someone who does not have the view that the world and the soul are the same, and that after death he will be permanent, enduring, eternal, immutable and that he will exist like that for ever hears the Buddha's teaching about the abandonment elimination of theories, opinions and attachment to them, the

> teaching that aims at the suppression of clinging obsessive attachments, the relinquishing of possessions, the end of craving, the cultivation of dispassion and the extinction of greed, hatred and delusion – he does not think, 'I shall be annihilated. I shall be destroyed. I shall no longer exist.' He is not distressed and confused. He is not anxious about something that does not exist.

A much later work called the Questions of King Milanda relates a dialogue about the no-self doctrine between Menander, the Greek king of Bactria in what is now Afghanistan in the second century B.C., and a Buddhist monk called Nāgasena. The text appears to be directed against a 'personalist' trend in early Buddhism according to which the interactions of the five constituents of personality (*skandhas*) produce a persisting individual that is reborn.

The monk says that he is called 'Nāgasena' but that is only a name, a label, a conventional usage. It does not mean that there is a personal entity. The King replies that this implies that in that case Nāgasena lacks parents, teachers and superiors in the monastic order. It also rules out agency and moral responsibility. At this point Nāgasena introduces the simile of the chariot, which is made up of wheels axle, and chassis. The chariot is neither identical with any one of its parts nor with their sum. The word 'chariot' is a conventional designation for the collection. That is to say, if the chariot is dismantled, we have collection of parts, not a chariot. Likewise with people. The name 'Nāgasena' is a conventional designation for a mental construction out of the five constituents of personality. No person is *found*, as opposed to being constructed. There is no further fact over and above the fleeting components of the stream of experiences. (This perhaps overlooks the fact that the chariot is the parts plus a structure.) Nevertheless, there is sufficient continuity within the stream for us to make sense of agency and moral responsibility. The Buddhist position is that moral responsibility does not require postulation of a permanent self that is the subject of experiences. If we are to be happy, we should be concerned about the future, even though it is not the future of my self.

The tradition has it that the Buddha deliberately left a number of questions unanswered. They include whether or not the world is eternal, whether or not the world is infinite, whether self and body are the same, whether or not enlightened beings (*Buddhas*) exist after death (a question that can be seen as making the mistaken assumption that there are entities with determinate identities).

In refusing to answer such questions the Buddha cannot be saying that he does not know, for the Buddhas are omniscient. Rather, he is saying that there is nothing to know. From the Buddhist point of view, such questions

reflect a resistance to the disturbing teachings of momentariness and the non-substantiality of beings.

One Buddhist tradition says that thinking about such matters is not conducive to the ending of suffering and enlightenment. One cannot lead a spiritual life by virtue of believing that the world is eternal or infinite in space and time! Another view is that the questions are themselves unanswerable because they are posed in categories that are not ultimately real. The questions about the cosmos presuppose that it is such that we are in a position to view it as a single whole and that past, present and future are divisions within a single temporal framework. It is difficult to formulate the question about whether the cosmos has a finite age. As Sir Michael Dummett has put it, 'Ascribing any finite age to it depends upon calibrating time . . . given any such calibration, a new one can always be derived from it so that the age of the universe becomes infinite, although no new events have been postulated. Conversely, given a calibration that brings out the age of the universe as infinite, it can always be revised so as to render it finite' [*Thought and Reality* p. 105].

Above all the problem is that the questions reflect a search for intellectual certainty and conviction, an attempt to comprehend and perhaps control. They imply that an absolute conception of reality, an Olympian perspective or a totally objective grasp of truth, is accessible to us. The Buddha's position seems to be that is it not the case that such a perspective is available, but even if it were, it would not help us along the path to enlightenment.

A much quoted traditional formulation distinguishes broadly between four Buddhist philosophical positions:

> The Vaibhāṣikas say that there are realities external to minds and that they are directly perceptible. The Sautrāntikas say that there are realities external to minds and that they are inferable from the occurrence of mental representations. The Yogācāras deny that there are any realities external to minds. The Mādhyamikas deny that there are any intrinsic natures.

The next chapters will look at these four schools of thought.

Further reading

Bechert and Gombrich (1984) is a collection of essays covering all forms of Buddhism, and is beautifully illustrated.

Rupert Gethin's *Foundations of Buddhism* is comprehensive. It is now supplementary to his invaluable, *Sayings of the Buddha*. Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, is a classic, written from a Theravādin point of view. Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons*, is indispensable for early Buddhist (Theravādin) representations of persons. Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, puts many things in context. Jayatilleke (1980) is informative about *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*.

Edward Conze's *Buddhist Scriptures* is a useful collection that contains the Questions of King Milanda.

Bronkhorst (2000) contains translations of much original material and connects early Buddhism with the Jaina renunciatory tradition. For the latter Jaini (1979) and Dundas (1992) are fundamental contributions.

Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy*, is a stimulating discussion of eastern and western reductionist accounts of the self. So is Chapter Five of Paul Williams, *Altruism and Reality*.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Can reductionism about persons make sense of human life?
2. If personal identity is an illusion what is making the mistake in the first place?

3 Abhidharma Buddhism

Chapter Outline

It appears that after approximately 200 B.C., some philosophically minded Buddhists set about reductively analysing our experiences, and the world-as-experienced in ways that were more systematic and comprehensive than the earlier reduction of the human person into the five impermanent components of personality (*skandhas*): body, feelings, sensory perceptions, habits and volitions and conceptual thoughts. They produced increasingly elaborate lists and classifications of basic mental and physical elements (*dharmas*). The systematic organization of what was thought to be implicit in the Buddha's teachings, discursively presented in the *Sutta-piṭaka*, was called the *Abhidharma-piṭaka.* Through the method of sub-division into minute detail and combination, the catalogues proliferated. What motivated this enterprise? As Frauwallner says, 'The authors believed that they were accruing religious merit'. Discriminative analysis (*dharma-pravicaya)* is an aspect of mental cultivation. This means insight (*prajñā*) into the inherent natures of the elements. It involves reducing familiar things and experiences to their constituents. It reinforces the belief that there is no self understood as an entity in its own right. The skilled

practitioner dissolves the objects of attachment into their elements and eliminates desires for them. The organization of *dharmas* into categories also facilitated the drawing of distinctions between experiences that are unwholesome and lead to more suffering from virtuous ones that lead to liberation.

We know about the Theravādin and Sarvāstivādin (also called Vaibhāṣika) Abhidharma sects (*nikāya*). It is the Vaibhāṣika view that will be described here. Our most valuable source of information is a work called the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* by Vasubandhu (350–400 A.D.), actually written from a Sautrāntika point of view. A text called the *Mahāvibhāṣa*, a commentary on the *Jñānaprasthāna*, one of the seven treatises constituting a collection called the *Abhidharma-piṭaka* of the Sarvāstivādins, is the source of the designation 'Vaibhāṣika'.

Ontology

Sarvāstivāda means 'the theory that everything exists'. The questions 'What exists?' or 'What is there?' cannot be answered by merely listing objects. We need a classification of types of existents. Moreover, there has to be some criterion or standard of judging what *really* exists and that criterion here is irreducibility: nothing that is composed of parts is authentically real. The basic elements in which all mental and material phenomena consist are called *dharmas*. They are so called because they support (*dhāraṇād* < *dhṛ*) their own identity. Each *dharma* has a fixed essence or *intrinsic* nature of its own (*svabhāva*). It is this possession of a permanent, fixed identity that differentiates the *dharmas* from the macroscopic aggregates. *Svabhāva* means *intrinsic* nature consisting in a specific inherent characteristic or power (*svalakṣaṇa*). The *svabhāva* of earth atoms is solidity, that of water atoms is fluidity and that of fire atoms heat. It is the *svabhāva* of consciousness to apprehend objects. The *svalakṣaṇa* is not other than whatever it characterizes. An object's 'having' *svabhāva* means that its identity is not determined by anything else. It means self-sufficiency or independent subsistence. The presence of *svabhāva* is held to permit the uniquely individuating definitions of the basic elements proposed by the endlessly ramifying Abhidharma catalogues: 'differentiation from the natures of others is in virtue of *svabhāva*' (*Abhidharmakośa* 1.18).

Other Buddhist philosophical traditions see a problem here. The basic elements are said to have intrinsic natures. But intrinsic nature is construed as

causal power, the capacity to do something. The nature of a white atom is to contribute to a white surface and bring about a certain perception. The aim is to identify the *dharmas* in virtue of their independent self-sufficiency, their being as they are in themselves. But it seems that they are not characterized in categorical terms but rather in dispositional ones, that is to say in terms of their capacity to interact with other *dharmas*. Strictly speaking, each is characterized in relational terms. We are not really specifying *internal* natures because causal powers have to do with external relations. We are not being told what the possessors of the causal powers are like in themselves. So the picture is one of a giant causal flux, but with no explanation of the *intrinsic* natures of the entities related in the flux. We shall return to this point in the next chapter.

The Sarvāstivādin catalogues distinguish conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) and unconditioned realities. The former are the constituents of causal processes, being generated by co-operating causes and conditions (*hetu* and *pratyaya*). The latter are whatever is exempt from causality: space (*ākāśa*), *nirvāṇa* understood as the cessation of the operation of *dharmas* due to knowledge, and a range of unactualized possibilities.

The conditioned phenomena are:

i) Material phenomena (*rūpa*): bodies, sense-faculties and corresponding types of objects
ii) Mind or thought (*citta*)
iii) Mental phenomena (*caitta*): feelings, sense-perceptions, intentions, volitions, attitudes, memories, cognitions as well as a plethora of moral virtues and weaknesses.
iv) 'Factors dissociated from mind' (*citta-viprayukta-dharma*) which cannot be classified as either material or mental. These are: words and meanings; traces of previous cognitions latent in the mind that supply the contents of dreams and hallucinations; a force called *prāpti that* regulates the aggregation of particular types of *dharmas* and locates them in a specific stream; the four characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*) common to conditioned phenomena i.e. origination, temporal extension, decline (entropy) and impermanence.

Dharmas, the elements of all mental and material phenomena, are manifest as the cosmos. They momentarily exercise their power in causal complexes. Since their existence does not depend upon anything else, they are basic and irreducible. The Sarvāstivādins distinguish between the primary and irreducible existence (*dravya-sat*) that belongs to the *dharmas* and the conventional or nominal existence (*prajñapti-sat*) that belongs to their products. *Dharmas* as primary realities exist in what *we* call past, present and future – but strictly

speaking, they exist timelessly or eternally. Their momentary occurrence as the world of our experience is the exercise of their causal efficacy (*kāritram*) that is also termed '*svalakṣaṇa*'. A parallel distinction is drawn between absolute or ultimate truth and reality (*paramārtha-satya*) and conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*). The latter is the world as it is understood by finite beings participating in conditioned causal processes. The former means reality as it is itself, as understood by the Buddhas, who are omniscient beings.

Some assumptions lie behind the Vaibhāṣika view:

i) All mental acts, including memories and expectations, have existent objects external to the mind. If past and future phenomena are cognized, they exist. Memories and future expectations have real objects.
ii) The subject-object relationship in awareness requires two real terms.
iii) To be is to cause an awareness: anything that is the object of an awareness exists.
iv) We cannot escape the consequences of past actions.

> [Past and future dharmas exist] because a cognition has a real object. When there is an object, there arises a cognition. When there is no object, there arises no cognition. If past and future dharmas did not exist, there would be cognitions with unreal objects as their objective support (*ālambana*). Therefore there would be no cognition of the past and future because of the absence of objective supports. If the past were non-existent, how could there be future effects of good and bad actions? For at the time when the effect arises, the efficient cause of its actualisation (*vipāka-hetu*) would not exist. That is why the Vaibhāṣikas hold that past and future exist. (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 5.25ab)
>
> The Sarvāstivādins say that everything – past, future and present – exists. By contrast, the Vibhajyavādins say that only the present exists, as well as past actions that have not yet yielded their consequences. What will be future, and actions that have borne fruit do not exist. (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 5.25cd)

(We shall be looking at the developed Vibhajyavāda view in the next chapter.)

> A reality that is past has ceased due to impermanence. A reality that is future has not originated. A reality that is present has originated and not yet ceased. When basic realities (*dharmas*) exercise efficacy, this is called the present. If *dharmas* do not yet exercise it, this is called the future. If efficacy has gone, this is called the past. (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* 1.20)

The Vaibhāṣika view is that what we experience as the present is the exercise of efficacy (*phala-ākṣepa-śakti*) – the power of projecting effects that belongs to a complex of *dharmas*. *Svalakṣaṇa* is the same as specific function or

efficacy (*kāritram*). Efficacy (*kāritram*) may or may not be exercised. We may think of the *dharmas* as they are in themselves as occupying another dimension of reality, from which they briefly migrate into our world, and to which homeland they return. The actualization, the temporal presence, of the *dharmas* in and as our world, is the exercise of their efficacy in a causal complex. Intrinsic natures are fixed (*dharma-svabhāva* is *nitya)*, but the *exercise* of efficacy is momentary (*anitya*) and circumstantial (*kādācitka*). The Vaibhāṣikas think that it was to these momentary discharges of energy in the world of conditioned phenomena that the Buddha was referring when he spoke of universal impermanence. The exercise of efficacy when a *dharma* enters a causal complex is not a *change* in a *dharma*, but just that element's manifesting what it permanently is. Each case of momentary actualization lasts just long enough to cause its own following moment. A *dharma* attracts the manifestation of another token of its own type. This explains stability and continuity. Efficacy may be compared to the charge on the countless identical electrons. A *dharma* is said to be in conditioned mode when it participates in a causal complex. 'Conditioned' means having the four characteristics of origin, duration, decline and impermanence (sometimes expressed as impermanence, suffering and the absence of essential identity). 'Decline', another basic reality, is what we may call entropy, and explains why the flower fades and the grass withers.

Time is understood in terms of the *exercise* of efficacy. We see here a distinctive understanding of time and a rejection of the view of the Vibhajyavāda-Dārṣṭānikas who held that time is a reality in its own right through which the transient conditioned elements of existence move. They say that only the *dharmas* that are *present now* exist, along with some retributive potencies of past intentional actions. The Vaibhāṣika view is that what we call past is those *dharmas* that have exercised their efficacy and what we call future is those *dharmas* that have not exercised that disposition. Time is not a substantial reality independent of subjects, objects and events. The *dharmas* do not 'pass through' time as though time were a separate reality. Our experience of temporal flow is in fact the replacement of *dharmas*. There is no real change on the level of the primary realities, which exist timelessly and immutably. (Some think that there is a problem in defining the present as the moment of the exercise of causal efficacy. The latter is an activity, a process that requires time. So the concept of temporal efficacy requires an independent grasp of the distinction between past, present and future.)

Both macroscopic objects and experiences are built up out of the material and mental elements of existence. Our world consists of entities which depend

upon primary existents. Both objects and subjects of experience are aggregates or complexes, made up of parts. Anything that consists of parts, anything that can be reduced to basic elements is said to exist by convention or nominally (*prajñapti-sat*). If something can be dissolved into components, there is a different understanding of it. The atoms composing a clay pot are primary existents, whereas the pot is a derivative 'conventional reality'. This is not to say that everyday things do not exist. But they are reducible to the basic realities of which they are composed.

All causally conditioned things, spread out in space and time, and featuring in our normal experience enjoy what is termed 'conventional existence'. Our 'life-world' consists of interdependent, impermanent, temporary entities and events that exist only, as it were 'for the time being'. They are the referents of our thoughts and language.

Perception

Where our interactions with the world about us are concerned, the Vaibhāṣikas are direct realists. Macroscopic combinations of the atomic factors are the causes and direct objects of awareness (*aṇu-saṃcaya-vāda*). Consciousness is thought of as a blank page and is not affected by external reality. It reveals objects without undergoing any change in its own constitution. This view is called *nirākāra-vāda* and it means that our perceptions of objects are unmediated by mental images, representations or ideas that fall as a veil between mental acts and external reality.

Indriya	*Viṣaya*	*Vijñāna*
Sense Faculties	*Objects*	*Experiences*
Sight	Colour/shape	Seeing
Audition	Sounds	Hearing
Smell	Odours	Smelling
Taste	Tastes	Tasting
Touch	Textures	Tactile
Mental	Thoughts	Thinking

Items in column three are products of the interaction of the corresponding pair (termed *āyatana*) in columns 1 and 2. They are described as perceptions directed towards objects (*prati-viṣaya-vijñapti*). Mind (*manas*) is also treated as a faculty. Just as we perceive physical objects by means of the senses, the

mind is that by which we grasp thoughts. This covers thinking about our experiences of objects and states of affairs that are not present to the senses.

Ethical consequentiality

It is difficult to see how we could lead ethical lives if only the present were real. The extension of causality to future consequences is a condition of ethical being. Moreover, we all know that the past may return to haunt us. The Buddhist insistence upon the importance of morality as the path to liberation is apparently challenged by two of its own tenets: All conditioned things (*saṃskārā*) are impermanent. All phenomena (*dharma*) are impersonal. If ethically significant intentional actions are conditioned events, and thus transitory and impersonal, how can they have subsequent effects in lives? Buddhists believe that liberation is not possible for those who do not accept that what is conventionally called (*prajñapti*) self is only a stream of components of personality. Unenlightened people mistakenly believe in an identity that is a further fact over and above the transient flux of embodied experiences. From this attachment to the soul arise the afflictions such as grasping, aversion and delusion. In fact, the notions of self and individual personal agency are but conventional human constructs. The underlying reality of what we call the person is a complex of components (*skandhas*) that admit of yet further reduction into the real basic elements. Nevertheless, a causal chain of embodied experiences is sufficient for the origin of the delusion that is personality. It is the intentional actions of conscious beings alone that are responsible for the arising and organization both of the sphere (*loka*) of creatures and of the environments in which they may experience the consequences of their actions. This is intended to exclude God, Time, the Soul or Prime Matter as causes of the cosmos. Intention (*cetanā*), which is a mental phenomenon (*dharma*) occurring in a stream, qualifies an action as ethically good or bad. But how do actions have long-term consequences? The answer is that an intentional action has both public expression (*vijñapti-dharma*) and a discrete feature called *avijñapti-dharma.* The latter embeds itself in a stream of experiences and remains there until circumstances are appropriate for the actualization (*vipāka*) of its efficacy in that stream. This *avijñapti-dharma* is charged with the moral quality of the public action from which it has arisen. The location of *avijñapti* in an experiential series requires what are called 'possessions' (*prāpti*). The latter belong to the class of those basic elements that are neither material nor

mental (*citta-viprayukta-dharma*) and are necessary if any phenomenon is to adhere to the experiential stream in which it occurs. The *avijñapti-dharmas* also account for settled commitments such as the Buddhist discipline and dispositions of character.

The personalists (*Pudgalavāda*)

Vasubandhu says that what vitiates other doctrines is their false belief that there is real personal identity: 'There is no salvation from other religions, because they are addicted to the false view that there is a permanent Self. They do not understand that what they call self is only a label for a series of physical and mental constituents. They imagine that identity is a distinct reality in its own right. From this clinging to the conviction that there is a Self arise the moral defects (*kleśa*).'

His commentator Yaśomitra quotes the poet Mātṛceta:

> As long as we think in selfish terms, the series of births does not cease. Selfishness stays in the heart while there is belief in the soul. No other teacher in the world propounds the unreality of the Self. So there is no path to peace other than your teaching.

The ninth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is a critique of what was called the *Vātsīputrīya* tradition, an offshoot of the *Sarvāstivāda* that held that the Buddha actually did accept a form of personal identity, a self (*pudgala*) that is the ground and support of changing mental states, as well as the substratum of *karma*. This was, to say the least, controversial. It must be remembered that Buddhism holds that acting unselfishly is not enough if it presupposes a belief there is still a persisting individual identity. Buddhism goes deeper and insists that not only is there no transcendental subject but also not the everyday concept of stable relatively stable continuous selfhood is a misconception. We do not know exactly what the *Vātsīputrīyas* taught because their views are preserved only in the works of their opponents. I suspect that they thought that something emerged from the combinations of the constituents that was sufficient to account for moral responsibility. It could not be considered a reality in its own right (a sixth *skandha*, as it were) because the Buddha did not mention it. But it was more than merely a convenient designation (*prajñapti*) for the aggregation of the interactive constituents of personality. Perhaps it was thought of as something that emerges as part of a natural process and enjoys

stability for a while. Vasubandhu responds that if this 'something' were really supervenient upon the constituents from which it emerges, it would be knowable. If it is not a newly emergent entity, it is reducible to the constituents and there is no point in positing it. Our experience can be explained as a continuum of mental (and physical events) and there is no need to posit any sort of self as the subject that owns the experiences.

Further reading

L. Pruden (1988) is an English version of Louis de la Vallée Poussin's French translation of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

E. Frauwallner, *Studies in the Abhidharma Literature*, especially Chapter VIII, is a rich source of information.

P. S. Jaini (2001), Section IV, contains some influential articles.

Alexis Sanderson, 'The Sarvāstivāda and its Critics', is illuminating. (This may be accessed via Professor Sanderson's website.)

James Duerlinger's *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, translates Vasubandhu's critique of the *Pudgalavāda* soul theory in the *Abhidharmakośa*.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Can the Abhidharma position make sense of a distinction between basic entities and causal powers?
2. Can they make sense of the notion of change, rather than that of replacement?

4 Sautrāntika Buddhism

Chapter Outline

The last chapter saw brief references to the Vibhajyavāda tradition. This outlook became prominent and acquired the name 'Sautrāntika'. They maintained that only the Pāli *Suttas*, not the Abhidharma texts, were the authentic words of the Buddha. They think that the Vaibhāṣikas have obscured the simplicity of the Buddha's original teaching and introduced the notion of permanence in the guise of *svabhāva*. Hence they taught a doctrine of radical momentariness (*kṣaṇika-vāda*), and simplified the ontology of the Vaibhāṣikas. They reject the

latter's category of unconditioned phenomena, holding that space is just the absence of extended objects. They say that *nirvāṇa* is simply the non-occurrence of suffering and not a reality or state of being. They reject the category of the *citta-viprayukta-dharmas*. So there are no *avijñapti-dharmas*, underpinning karmic causality and no *prapti* accounting for continuities within a stream of experiences. Also rejected are the *sāmānya-lakṣaṇas* (birth, continuation, entropy and impermanence) characterizing the brief occurrence of *dharmas* in conditioned complexes.

The Vaibhāṣikas say that the atomic basic realities (*dharmas*) are permanent essential natures (*svabhāva*) that may or may not exercise their causative functions in and as the world. The Sautrāntikas retain the notion of *dharma* but abandon that of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva)*. We saw in the last chapter that there may be a problem lurking behind the Vaibhāṣikas' apparent interpretation of intrinsic nature as causal power. The reason for positing intrinsic natures for the *dharmas* is to enable their identification in virtue of their independent self-sufficiency and thus to distinguish them from the conditioned, fluid and transient macroscopic formations that they constitute. But in fact intrinsic nature is characterized in causal terms as the capacity to interact with other *dharmas*. So each *dharma* is actually characterized in relational terms. We are not really specifying their *internal* natures in categorical terms but only in dispositional ones. Causal powers have to do with external relations. We are not being told what the possessors of the causal powers are like in themselves. So the picture is one of a giant causal flux, but with no explanation of the *intrinsic* natures of the entities related in the flux. This picture the Sautrāntikas are happy to accept.

So the Sautrāntikas retain the notion of basic particulars but reject that of essence (*svabhāva*). They understand the basic realities as instantaneous unique particulars that are just moments of causal efficacy. They term the basic realities '*svalakṣaṇa*', which was one of the Vaibhāṣika terms for intrinsic nature expressed as causal efficacy. Such instants, *dharmas* minus *svabhāva*, may perhaps be understood as flashes of energies forming fields of forces. The Sautrāntikas insist that production by the co-operation of causes and conditions obtains at every level, 'all the way down', and does not just apply to macroscopic formations. All things are momentary in the radical sense that they exist only for the moment at which they are produced. They argue that all entities are inherently perishable, having no intrinsic tendency to continue in existence. They reason that: Everything decays. Decay is non-existence. But non-existence has no causes. So decay needs no external cause. It must be the

intrinsic nature of things to be perishable. Given that perishability is natural, they cease spontaneously at the moment of their origination. Accordingly, there is no sense in speaking of real past and future phenomena, as the Vaibhāṣikas do.

While the Vaibhāṣikas hold that aggregates of atoms are the direct objects of perception, the Sautrāntikas deny that the *svalakṣaṇas* are directly perceptible. We are acquainted with mental forms when clusters of *svalakṣaṇas*, purely causal potencies, somehow impart impressions of their forms (*ākāra*) to conscious episodes. This theory is called *sākāra-vāda*. Clusters of unique particulars are the material causes and objective supports of perceptions. Our experience of external reality is mediated by mental representations caused by the interplay of evanescent particulars. There is some sort of co-ordination (*sarūpya*) between our mental images and the behaviour of the particulars. We might consider here the case of rainbows. What we see are bands of colour in the sky. But this phenomenal representation is caused by light waves refracted off droplets of water. We do not directly see or feel the unique instants that are, as it were, the raw materials of the world. Nevertheless they impress themselves on episodes of awareness and are imperfectly grasped through the filters of the mental images and concepts that they cause. Our concepts lead us to reify the given and suppose that the reality basically consists of enduring subjects confronting a world of objects, properties and structural principles.

The Sautrāntikas say that there are instantaneous realities external to minds and that they are *inferable* as the causes of the occurrence of mental representations (*jñāna-ākāra*). If the contents of awareness are just mental representations, how do we know that there is an external reality? The reply is that our representations do not occur at random, but are about definite objects at specific times and places. Moreover, since we have no control over much of which presents itself in our experiences, it is unlikely that mental representations have been entirely generated from within a stream of experiences. Surely they have causes other than the immediately preceding moment (*samanantara-pratyaya*) in a mental stream. They conclude that the causes of our mental representations are evanescent realities external to experiences. Opponents are quick to point out that self-destructing instantaneous particulars do not last long enough to enter into even short-lived formations that could cause anything. Indeed the view that existence means spontaneous destructibility will attract the charge of nihilism. And we shall see that the Sautrāntika representationalism may lead to idealism, which says that there is no need to posit realities external to minds and that only ideas are real.

Ethical consequentiality

The Sautrāntikas account for karmic continuity by saying that an intentional action, albeit instantaneous, is a 'seed' that initiates a transformation in an experiential series (*citta-saṃtāna-pariṇāma-viśeṣa*). Its fruition is either reward or punishment. The originating cause need not last until its effect is realized since it is not a sustaining cause – like parents who are necessary for the origination but not the continued existence of their offspring. They argue that if an action continued to exist until its fruition, it would have to be eternal. But if it ceased to exist, it could not produce anything. A seed initiates a series beginning with germination. The fruit arises as the culmination of the series, rather than directly from the seed. But it still needs the seed to start the process. Although the series and the result depend upon the seed as the originating cause, we do not say that the seed is either annihilated or that it is eternal. Likewise an intention initiates a series of mental events from which the consequence results. The series requires the initial intention and the consequence arises from the series. The intention is neither annihilated, nor is it eternal.

Dignāga and Dharmakīrti

Dignāga (480–540 A.D.) was a Buddhist philosopher whose most important work is the *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*. He also wrote a work called 'The Examination of Objective Supports of Cognition' (*Ālambana-parīkṣā*), extracts from which are translated below. He belonged to the Sautrāntika tradition of thought, which while admitting a real domain of instantaneous particulars external to minds claims that what we know are only its reflections mediated by mental images and discursive concepts. Dharmakīrti (600–660 A.D.) developed Dignāga's ideas and exercised an inestimable influence on subsequent debates. His works include the *Pramāṇa-Vārttika*, the *Pramāṇa-Viniścaya* and the *Nyāya-bindu*. His treatise called the *Proof of Other Streams of Experiences* addresses the problem of other minds and argues that there is a multiplicity of streams of experience.

Prior to Dignāga most thinkers in the Buddhist tradition had accepted that there are three means of knowing (*pramāṇa*): sensory perception, inference and reliable testimony (i.e. both human authorities and scriptural reports of the Buddha's teachings). Dignāga denies that testimony is an independent means of knowing in its own right and subsumes it under inference. The rationale is

that we do not unquestioningly assent to what a person says but accept that their words are true only when we believe that they are well-informed, reliable and sincere. But above all what is apparent is a repudiation of the authority of the Vedic scriptures, which are held to be a *pramāṇa* in their own right by the orthodox Brahminical traditions.

Dignāga divorces sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*) from thinking (*kalpanā*) that always involves concepts and words. The former is pure sensation whereas the latter always involves words, concepts and judgements. Dignāga calls it 'inference' (*anumāna*). Sensory perception never involves general concepts (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*). Perception, always valid because there is no scope for distortion by the workings of the mind, is direct experience of external reality, which consists of fluid clusters of unique, momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*). Because they do not share any common features, particulars are indescribable. We have here an instance of a reductionist and nominalist outlook: everything truly real is individual or particular.

The expressions '*svalakṣaṇa*' and '*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*' are inherited from the Abhidharma. There '*svalakṣaṇa*' means the characteristic activity of an individual basic element (*dharma*) as it is in itself, and '*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*' means the features common to *dharmas* when their combinations produce conditioned, macroscopic formations. Such generalities include non-eternity, unsatisfactoriness and lack of persisting identity. As a Sautrāntika, Dignāga accepts that reality consists of clusters of unique instantaneous particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) and denies that each atomic factor has an unchanging and eternal essence. General features are conceptually constructed by perceivers.

Moreover, he believes that the categories of things (*padārtha*) that the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realists claim to be basic structures discovered in the world are in fact *imposed* by the workings of our minds. He says that conceptual construction (*kalpanā*) is the interpretation of what is given in pure sensation by means of proper names, words for general features (*jāti, sāmānya*), words for qualities (*guṇa*), words for actions (*karman*) and words for individual substances (*dravya*). Our minds group unique particulars together and understand them as continuing objects bearing types of properties. In other words, the constructive activity of minds *constitutes* objects out of the flux of sensation. In reality, there are no universals, no real stability and no entities with determinate identities.

Dignāga thinks that thought and language are inseparable: conceptual thought is born out of language and language is born out of concepts. Conceptual thought

and language deal in generalities (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*). But because there are no objective general features, even simple concepts are at one remove from reality. They are causally related to the realities and not just arbitrary fictional inventions. But there is a gap between how our minds work and the way things are. It is a mistake to suppose that the map is the territory. His view is that concepts and thinking are interpretations that disguise rather than disclose.

So all inferential procedures are distanced from reality. Logic is not about reality as rightly articulated in language, but is a set of rules governing the moves in a conceptual language game. 'All this convention involving inferential reason and properties to be established is based on the distinction between property and property-possessor which is itself imposed by the human mind: it is not grounded in anything existing outside the mind.' But his contribution to an empiricist theory of inference was very influential, although it must be borne in mind that it is similar to ideas found in the works of Vasubandhu and in a text called the *Nyāyapraveśa*. Dignāga proposed that in a valid inference, we must have observed cases of an inseparable connection (*avinābhāva-saṃbandha*) between the logical reason (*hetu*) and what it establishes (*sādhya*). We observe wherever the reason occurs, there the *sādhya* occurs also. We can be confident that we are reasoning reliably and responsibly (the three conditions are not claimed to be of an absolute guarantee of truth) when three conditions (*trairūpya*) obtain:

(i) The logical reason (*hetu*) must really be a property of the subject (*pakṣa*) of the inference.
(ii) The logical reason must be present in some instance (*sapakṣa*) other than the subject of the inference, which is similar to that subject in that it too possesses the property that is to be proved (*sādhya*).
(iii) Whatever lacks the property to be proved also lacks the proving property or reason. There must be no instances (*vipakṣa*) where the proving property occurs and the property to be proved does not.

Take the inference that sounds (*pakṣa*) are impermanent (*sādhya*) because they are products (*hetu*). [Invariable association: Whatever is produced is impermanent.] Here the *sapakṣa* could be something uncontroversially impermanent such as a pot that also exhibits the property of being a product. It is open to us to cite an actual instance illustrating the joint absence of the property to be proved and the logical reason. The atmosphere would be a negative example because it both lacks impermanence and is not produced by effort.

Apoha: the exclusion theory of linguistic functioning

The thinkers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika realist tradition think that objective general features (universal properties, natural kinds, qualities such as colours, shapes and sizes) are the grounds for the repeated applications of general terms. On this view we classify some individual animals as cows because they form a natural kind. The single, real universal property 'being a cow' is itself an entity common to all cows. But Dignāga is an anti-essentialist and a nominalist who denies that there are any objective generalities structuring and causally regulating the world, which consists of instantaneous unique and indescribable particulars. But if there are really neither shared properties nor even resemblances, how do words and concepts function? They cannot all behave like proper names because in that case we could not say anything *about* things. Dignāga's answer is that the word-meanings and concepts forming the fabric of inherited and public conventional understanding 'exclude each other'. The idea is that words (and concepts) do not have meaning in virtue of their referring to extra-linguistic realities. Rather, they are signs whose meaning derives from their roles in a framework of significances, where they stand in relations of opposition and complementarity. (Later thinkers say that apoha means the mutually exclusive inter-relations of modes of presentation (*pratibimba*) and concepts (*vikalpa*) that determine what we deem objects and states of affairs.) Words and concepts normally have both an inclusive and an exclusive role. Dignāga emphasizes the exclusive function. A word is expressive when it excludes other meanings belonging to the same system. Dignāga denies that we need to posit a single real universal property shared by all individual cows as the basis of the application of the word/concept 'cow'. It is sufficient that what those clusters of particulars that we call cows have in common is just their being different from whatever is not treated as a cow. We apply a meaning such as 'cow' just on the basis of the difference of cows from everything else. This 'difference from non-cows' is not a genuine feature. Difference is purely relational. The word 'cow' does not stand for a property or essence. We sort some particulars because it suits human interests to do so. Language is a network of mutually exclusive meanings that we have conventionally constructed in accordance with what matters for us. To illustrate: We apply the word 'analgesic' to a variety of pills with totally distinct pharmacological properties because they relieve pain. The concept

'analgesic' is a humanly constructed one because pain relief is a matter of interest to us. It should be noted that we have here a theory about the functioning of language and not a theory about the acquisition of language or the acquisition of language and concepts. Were it the latter, it would be impossible to explain how anyone could learn the meaning of a word in the first place, because they would have to exclude an infinite range of other things. As for the former, there is no problem: we are born into a beginninglessly established linguistic community.

Self-awareness of mental events

All Buddhists deny that there is any constant experiencing subject that is distinct from the process of awareness. So how do we account for the phenomenon of subjectivity? Dignāga says that just as feelings are 'self-aware', each and every perception and judgement is aware of itself (*sva-saṃvitti*): it is inherently self-illuminating. A cognition simultaneously and in virtue of the same act cognizes its own form as well as that of what it is about. If things were otherwise minds would be like video-recorders receiving and recording information and there would be no inner mental life. Reflexive mental events follow each other so quickly that there is generated the illusion that there is a persisting subject of experiences that we call a self.

The *Ālambana-parīkṣā*

According to the Vaibhāṣika direct realists, the objective ground (*ālambana-pratyaya*) of a thought is the reality in the world that it is about. According to this theory, an objective ground is both the extra-mental cause of an idea and the provider of its representational content. An hallucination is not an objectively grounded thought in the sense that it has content but it is caused by some defect in the perceptual system. Dignāga agrees that for something to qualify as the objective ground of an awareness, it must be both the cause and the representative content of that awareness, but he does not accept that such causes have to be extra-mental realities.

In his *Ālambana-parīkṣā*, Dignāga argues against the Vaibhāṣikas that their realistic atomic theory actually leads to the admission that the *direct* objects of perceptual awareness are internal mental forms and not mind-independent realities. The Vaibhāṣikas hold that we directly perceive structured masses of real atoms of various kinds and that these cause our perceptions. Like

Vasubandhu, Dignāga questions the possibility of atomic aggregation. But even granting that collections of atoms may cause mental representations, the atoms do not figure in the subjective content of awareness. A compound of clay atoms may cause the perception of a pot, but we do not see such a cluster of atoms. The atoms do not enter into the content of the representation: what we have is an experience of a solid, coloured extended object. It could be argued that a conglomerate of atoms does constitute the representative content. But the problem here is that conglomerates are not real and so fail to qualify as causes of ideas. Dignāga concludes that only an idea (a mental representation that appears as if it is about something external) can be the support of another idea. The cause of a mental representation can be another representation: thoughts may arise from other thoughts rather than from external objects. An idea may bring about another idea and be sufficiently like it to mirror its representational content. Although it seems that the conclusion is an idealist one, Dignāga is not an idealist. He believes that the momentary particulars exist independently of minds, but the direct objects of acquaintance are their representations in consciousness. He wants to persuade us that our shared, conventional framework of representations is just that, and that our thoughts and concepts do not mirror reality as it is in itself. The goal is to encourage us to realize that our everyday attachments, and our thinking in terms of ourselves as persisting individual subjects confronting a world of already established propertied objects awaiting our descriptive understanding, are really just matters of conventional construction. Once such realization is achieved we are in a position to detach ourselves from our basically self-centred concerns and follow the path of insight and compassion leading towards enlightenment.

Extracts from 'The Examination of Objective Supports of Awareness with the author's own commentary' (*Ālambana-parīkṣā-vṛtti*)

People who believe that external things are the objective support of sensory perceptions suppose that either atoms are the support since they cause the cognition, or that a conglomerate of atoms is the support because such a form is the representative content of awareness.

Even if the atoms are the cause of sensory cognition, since the cognition does not represent them, the atoms are not the intentional object (*viṣaya*) of the cognition (just as the sensory faculties are not).

The expression 'intentional object' means the proper form of something as *it is grasped in cognition*, since the cognition is manifest as having that form (*ākāra*).

Although the atoms are the cause of the manifestation of the thought-form, their nature is not grasped by cognition (just as the nature of the sense faculties is not).

Thus the atoms are not the objective support of cognition.

As for the conglomerate of atoms, although it is what is represented in awareness, it is not the objective support because

It is not the cause of the phenomenal representation (ābhāsa).

It makes sense that when a thing produces a cognition that represents it as it is, that thing is the objective support. It has been stated that such is the originating condition. But the conglomerate of atoms does not qualify as such

because it is not a reality – like the experience of the moon seeming double.

In the case of seeing the moon as double owing to a sensory defect, although the moon appears double in awareness, it is not the direct object of awareness. Likewise the conglomerate is not the objective support because it cannot be the cause since it does not exist as a real entity.

Thus what is external is not the direct object of awareness.

The external things called 'atom' and 'conglomerate of atoms' are not the supports of awareness, because although the atoms cause the awareness they do not feature in its representative content, and while the conglomerate appears as the content of awareness, it is not its cause.

Some hold that the aggregated form is the instrumental cause of the cognition. The form of the atom is not the object of awareness, in the same way that its solidity is not.

Everything is multifaceted. So it is perceived under some form or description. The atoms have the nature of being the originating cause of awareness and are represented as conglomerates. Just as real solidity is not an object of visual perception, likewise real atomicity is not.

While there are no differences between the atoms that make up objects, it may be said that the differences between perceived objects emerge from the different formations of atoms. But this is not the case because (according to the opponent) the atoms that are the only true realities do not have different dimensions. The differences between the forms of objects operate on the level of human conventions. Conventional modes of differentiation do not apply to the atoms. Everyday objects are posited by the human mentality.

Pots etc exist only as human conventions because if the atoms are taken away the cognition whose form derives from them is lost. But this does not happen in

> the case of what is truly real. Therefore it is intelligible that the direct objects of sensory perceptions are not realities external to minds.
>
> But the knowable internal form, which appears as if external to the mind, is the direct object because it has the form of awareness and is its support.
>
> Although there are no external objects, an internal reality, *an idea appearing as if external*, is the objective support.
>
> The internal mental form is the objective support of awareness since it both supplies the manifest image in the cognition of the object, and produces the cognition of the object. (The internal form both supplies the manifest image belonging to the cognition (which the atoms do not) and is the cause (which the conglomerate qua unreal, cannot be)).

Dharmakīrti

Dharmakīrti identifies belief in a substantial, permanent and personal self as a form of ignorance, indeed enchantment. This ignorance is a genuinely effective occurrence that brings about a complex of a specific mentality and behavioural dispositions (*saṃskāra*). Belief in the self is inherited from mistaken constructions of selfhood in previous lives. From mistaken adherence to belief in the self arise the moral defects (*kleśa*) such as desires, infatuations and antagonisms. The settled condition that is attachment to the self is expressed in first personal thoughts: 'The innate belief in a personal reality is expressed in I-thoughts such as: "May I be happy, may I not suffer."' Attachment to self is inextricably associated with the notion of 'mine' and this inevitably generates desires – we want things to go well for ourselves. It automatically generates hatred and aversions towards whatever is felt to be inimical to one's own interests – often what are imagined to be other selves. Striving for personal happiness conceals the true nature of the moral defects so we do not see them for what they are. As long as there is clinging to self, there is rebirth. But following the Buddhist path, including repeated meditation on the unreality of the person and the way in which belief in the self's reality causes suffering and frustration, on the impermanence and non-substantiality of phenomena, gradually eliminates misunderstanding and the consequent moral defects. Interiorization of and insight into universal non-substantiality, seeing the truth, are the proper functions of a purified mind. Philosophy helps by revealing that nothing real can be permanent. We are captivated by an inherited and shared web of conceptualization (*kalpanā*). But the validity of the teaching that dispels our enchantment (*moha*) is known by its fruits.

Metaphysics

Dharmakīrti agreed with Dignāga that in the final analysis objective reality is a flux of momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) that are inexpressible and incommunicable as such. By virtue of their configurations in relation to the cognizing subject, they determine the differences in the representative content of cognitions. Each *svalakṣaṇa* has its own causal effectiveness (*arthakriyā*). Dharmakīrti develops Dignāga's view. Instead of saying what is real by specifying some type of entities (e.g. the *svalakṣaṇas* or the *dharmas*), he uses a criterion: only what is causally effective is real. Nothing permanent can be causally effective either successively or in the present because it cannot engage in processes of change. Each particular has specific location, time and form. If something does not perform useful activity, then it is not a real entity, since it satisfies the criteria for non-existence; but if it does perform useful activity, then it is not permanent. This criterion of reality rules out the existence of anything supposedly eternal and unchanging such as God, the soul and its permanent consciousness, the sounds of the Vedic scriptures, the eternal relation between Vedic words and their meanings, universals and primal material nature (*prakṛti*) that is inert prior to its plural manifestation as the cosmos. The question about the reality of otherwise of permanence is central to the dialectic between Buddhists and Brahmins, some aspects of which we will be examining in later chapters.

Dharmakīrti follows Dignāga's epistemology: only sensory perception and inference are means of knowing (*pramāṇa*). Knowledge is reliable cognition in so far as it contributes to the successful accomplishment of some purpose. It may also reveal something new: but to Dharmakīrti's mind, the instrumental function is primary and matter of fact truths are *revealed* in practice. Although like Dignāga he refuses to accept that testimony and language can be epistemic authorities in their own right – they are primarily thinking here of the absolute authority that the Brahmins ascribe to the uncreated Vedic scriptures – in fact, he says that language may be an instrument of knowing in the derivative sense that it communicates what are already established to be useful truths about what is to be sought after and what avoided. The Buddha, and the scriptural records of his teachings, are sources of knowledge in that they reveal things that would be otherwise unknown, and tell the truth about what should be pursued and what eschewed.

As we have seen, according to the Sautrāntika outlook there are no permanent realities. To be real is to be causally effective and that implies the capacity for

change. But they take it for granted that were there anything permanent it could neither act nor change. Dharmakīrti says that there is no such thing as a permanent means of knowing (*nityaṃ pramāṇam*) such as the Vedic scriptures or a divine intelligence because knowledge operates in a world of changing realities. A means of knowing cannot be unchanging because it is concerned with impermanent objects. Whatever happens as part of a process cannot be permanent and unchanging. Something permanent could not be a means of knowing about what is impermanent because it could not depend upon assisting factors such as objects, subjects and instruments in the case of the knowing process. The means of knowing are such because they enable us to achieve our goals in a world of ever changing realities.

Perception and thinking

It is the particulars that are immediately given in sensory perception. Dharmakīrti outlines his view of knowledge and perception in the first chapter of his *Nyāyabindu*:

> The accomplishment of human goals presupposes right cognition.
>
> Right cognition is twofold: perception and inference.
>
> Perception is free from conceptualisation (*kalpanā*) and is reliable (lit. non-errant)
>
> Conceptualisation is cognition involving a representation that is *capable* of beingexpressed in words. (He thus modifies Dignāga's view that thought and language always go together in suggesting that thought is prior to language.)
>
> Cognition that is both free from conceptualisation and from defects is sense-perception (*pratyakṣa*) [as a means of knowing.]
>
> That has four aspects:
>
> a) Cognition involving the sense-faculties;
> b) Understanding (*mano-vijñānam*) produced by the sensory cognition that is its immediate cause. This process takes the initial sensory cognition of the external object as its object.
> c) All minds and mental events are reflexively aware of themselves. (The point here is that they do not require illumination by another conscious principle such a conscious self). The reflexivity of awareness is used by some Brahmin thinkers as a way of proving the permanence of the self.
> d) Direct Yogic intuition into the atomic composition of reality that does not require sense-faculties as intermediaries.
>
> The momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) are the objects of sensory perception. They are what is real in the final analysis (*paramārtha-sat*), because reality is that which has the capacity for causal efficacy.

> Different from them is what falls under generalising conceptualisation (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇam*).
>
> That is the sphere of thinking (*anumānasya viṣayaḥ*). [This is *kalpanā*]
>
> Perceptual cognition produces knowledge when thought enables us to achieve or obtain something.
>
> Knowledge is a cognitive state that is in conformity with reality, because successful activity follows when cognitions agree with realities.

Dharmakīrti's theory about the relation between perception and the world can be understood in terms of the triad: sensation – image – concept. A cluster of *svalakṣaṇas* has the power to produce the sensation of blue. Blue impressions produce an awareness having two aspects: a blue mental image (*ākāra*) and the blue mental image's being aware of itself. The image copies the impressions. Constructive mental activity (*kalpanā*), conditioned by traces of prior experiences, interprets the image and produces the thought (*vikalpa*) that something is blue. This thought enables us to think, act and communicate. The external particulars are only the indirect objects of the thoughts that they cause. But the unique instants behave in such a way that we can organize them under unifying concepts. While our concepts, involving the association of names and general properties with the given, do not copy the fluid play of the real particulars, they represent it indirectly as a map does as territory. We do not directly know reality as it is in itself because we are primarily aware of images, some of which are converted into concepts, derived form sensory impressions. In short, there is a gap between the way our minds work and the way things work.

Sense perception on its own has no practical application because it does not discriminate anything. Assuming that the senses are operating normally and environmental conditions do not obstruct them, it cannot be either true or false because truth and falsity apply only to conceptual mental states. Perceptual sensation applies to reality as it is in itself (*vastu*) before we start to thinking about it. But it is only when an aspect of reality has been mentally discriminated in a perceptual *judgement* (*adhyavasāya*) that we can act in relation to it. Judgements using concepts enable successful activity (i.e. are reliable) when they are causally related to the real particulars constituting events.

A *vikalpa* is a concept that the mind constructs out of the data given in sensory awareness. Cognitions involving apparently shared features of objects are conceptual interpretations based on experiences of particulars. Conceptualization involves generalizations but there are no objective generalities.

Objective reality is strictly ineffable, since it includes no general features. Like Dignāga, he wants us to realize that our conventional ways of understanding, integral to which is the notion of individual subjectivity, in the final analysis disguise the truth.

But to find our way around successfully, we need to make discriminations using concepts and words. Some concepts, and elaborated conceptual schemes, apply more adequately than others to objective reality: i.e. they work better for us in leading to successful activity. *Vikalpas* interpret and organize the data of sensation, making them intelligible and serviceable. The store of human concepts, built up from impressions derived from a beginningless series of previous experiences, is transmitted down the generations via shared language. While some complex concepts ultimately derive from sensory impressions and mental images formed from them, others, especially the idea that there is a persisting soul, are just produced by the creative imagination.

A problem arises when people overlook the purely conventional nature of what are only human ways of thinking and suppose that they correspond to objective realities. It is a natural mistake to suppose that our concepts are copies of reality or that our representations mirror reality as it is in itself. Error occurs when conceptual thought takes its own forms to correspond directly to reality. Since reality consists of momentary unique particulars, general concepts cannot represent it as it is in itself. Moreover, stable concepts, enshrined in language, encourage us to think that there are stable realities.

A much-quoted verse (354) from the Chapter on Perception of the *Pramāṇavārttika* reads:

> 'Mind is really not diversified but it appears to be differentiated into objects known or grasped (*grāhya*), perceivers (*grāhaka*) and cognitions because of mistaken views.'

Later thinkers sometimes read this in an idealist sense, but that it not Dharmakīrti's meaning. He means that the oppositions between the perceiving subject, objects and thoughts are functions of the way our minds work and not genuine realities. It is we who contrast subjects and objects, thinking them external to each other. The differentiation of subjects, acts and objects of cognition within the one mind appears because of inherited influences of previous ideas in a beginningless and uninterrupted stream of experiences. Positing oneself as an individual thinker facing a world of objects is a kind of selfishness that Buddhist practice aims to eliminate. Since the polar notions of object and subject are interdependent, by exposing the falsity of one, we can expose the

falsity of the other. Once a person has really understood that the conventional view of reality as consisting of enduring objects existing independently of the mind of the individual perceiver is false and that our thoughts are not copies of reality, they can come to understand that selfhood and its attachments is an illusory construct.

The impossibility of permanence

We have seen that Dharmakīrti takes dynamic causal efficacy as criterial of reality. It follows that nothing can be permanent and static. Dharmakīrti's opponents recognize different forms of permanence (*nityatā*). By permanent they mean both eternal and immutable. (Some realists distinguish two varieties: absolute permanence and permanence compatible with change.) Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika ascribe permanence to kinds, universals and some relations. The Mīmāṃsaka ritualists say that both the basic sound units (*varṇa*) of the Sanskrit language, the relation between a Sanskrit word and its meaning, and the Vedic scriptures as a whole are all permanent realities. Others hold that consciousness is the permanent nature of the soul. The Sāṃkhyas, for example, say that the true nature of the soul is permanently static conscious. (Dignāga had challenged this tenet with the consideration that if the self really changes when a cognition occurs, it is impermanent. But if it does not change when cognition occurs, it is not a knowing subject.) The consensus among the various sorts of realists is that permanent realities are revealed and known by their appropriate manifestations (*vyakti*) in space and time. Individual entities are manifestations of universals. A specific usage of a word manifests a timeless meaning. The evolutes of the material nature (*prakṛti*) postulated as the universal material cause by the Sāṃkhyas are its manifestations. Realists argued that such manifestation does not compromise eternity and immutability. Dharmakīrti says that manifestation entails mutability. If there are universals, they could never be manifest in individuals. Similarly, if the sounds of the Vedas are permanent, we could never hear their manifestations. If the soul is eternally of the nature of awareness it would always know everything or nothing.

Dharmakīrti examines the notion of manifestation in the context of the revelation of objects by the cognitive process. On a realist account, some form of cognitive activity, accompanied by factors such as light, is instrumental in revealing already existing realities. But according to Dharmakīrti, since everything is momentary there can be no already existing objects. Objects

have to be constituted out of the data of sensation. He insists that whenever such objects are cognized, this happens as an aspect of a process. Take a stream of moments that someone may identify as constituting a vase. The stream is occurring in a dark room. Open the door and switch on the light. You see the vase. It becomes manifest. Dharmakīrti's view is that the presence of the observer (and the light) has introduced a change into the situation. The 'stream of vase moments' is not what it was. It is now involved with the light and the cognitions of the observer. The latter introduce additional factors that render the 'pot-stream' capable of producing a cognition in the observer. The manifestation or revelation of the pot is the product of the co-operation of a variety of causes upon which it depends. Now consider the possibility of the manifestation of permanent realities whose natures are supposed to be entirely self-sufficient and independent of co-operating extra factors. If the essential nature of an entity of that kind is such that it is productive, it will always produce its characteristic effects. If its essential nature is such that it is not productive, it will never produce effects. Let us apply this to consciousness: if the nature of consciousness is to actually illuminate objects, it will always illuminate everything. And in the case of universals, if being manifest as individual instances is internal to their nature, they will always be manifesting all their instances (and we will be aware of them). In the normal case of cognition (of the vase), manifestation was dependent upon co-operating causal factors and crucially upon the introduction of an extra-factor into the situation that rendered the stream of moments capable of producing an awareness. But this cannot apply in the case of allegedly permanent entities that are supposed to be in principle knowable. When Dharmakīrti concludes that their revelation is impossible, he is assuming the realist consensus that if something is real, it is in principle if not in fact knowable.

Logic

As we have seen Dharmakīrti thinks that while immediate sensation relates directly to reality that consists of unique instantaneous particulars, the mental images (*ākāra*) and concepts (*vikalpa*) that they cause and in terms of which we interpret what is given do so indirectly. But Dharmakīrti does not think that our concepts are imaginary inventions, although some are. The instantaneous actualities behave in such a way that we can organize them under concepts. Although the natural regularity (*svabhāva-pratibandha*)

between smoke and fire or that between something's being an oak and its being a tree holds primarily between two concepts, it also reflects a real state of affairs that causes us to make the connection between the concepts. Dharmakīrti says that inference does not grasp the realities directly in that it operates by determining the object in a mental representation that is not itself the object. But because the representation of the object is causally related to the real objects, we can make reliable inferences.

The key feature of a valid logical inference is the invariant association (*vyāpti*) between the logical reason (*hetu*) and what is to be established (*sādhya*). Dharmakīrti says that the invariant association of As with Bs (which he also calls *avinābhāva* –'*sine qua non*') must be guaranteed by a natural regularity (*svabhāva-pratibandha*). The theory of natural regularity attempts to underpin some forms of inseparable connection in the absence of objective universals. We know that the connection between the logical reason and the property to be proved could not be otherwise when the connection is either that between cause and effect (*kārya-hetu*: e.g. fire and smoke) or a case of shared nature (*tadātmya* /*svabhāva-hetu* – if something is an oak, then it is a tree). This necessary relation is the natural regularity. So we may infer from the fact of something's being an oak that it is a tree and from the presence of smoke to the presence of fire. This principle is applied in characteristically Buddhist arguments like, 'If something is produced, it is perishable by nature'.

While Dignāga seems to have been content to allow that the idea of invariable association is the product of a finite range of observed instances, as well as the lack of counterexamples (*adarśana-mātra*), Dharmakīrti wants to strengthen the basis of inference because the inductive approach is insufficiently general and leaves open the possibility of our discovering exceptions in the future. His teacher Īśvarasena thought that our constant association of the logical reason (*hetu*) and that which is to be established (*sādhya*) was based merely on the fact of our not having observed any exceptions to the rule (*adarśanamātra*). Dharmakīrti thought that this made the basis of inference too fragile: why should we not discover an exception in the future? Moreover, we have not surveyed every relevant instance. We do not know that there is no instance where the *hetu* occurs and the *sādhya* does not. We just have not come across one so far. This is why he argued that the inseparability of *hetu* and *sādhya* had to be grounded in the natural order of things. This means that the presence of the logical reason guarantees the presence of the property to be proved. There can be no counterexample.

We saw that causal connection is one of the two forms of natural regularity between the logical reason and what is to be proved. A causal relation is understood through positive and negative perceptions. The causal connection between smoke and fire is known when we find that smoke, which had not been present, appears when fire is introduced and that when the fire is extinguished, the smoke disappears.

Dharmakīrti applies this in a proof of the existence of streams of experience other than one's own. He argues that we have inferential knowledge of other minds. Given that in one's own case there is observation of the phenomena of language and behaviour immediately after volition or intention, and given that they are not observed in the absence of volition, one knows from one's own case that there is a cause-effect relation between volition and the occurrence of actions. The causal relation is established purely because we are cognizant of the relations between intention and action and know that where there is no intention there is no action. Seeing that actions separate from us occur even when we have not framed any intention, we infer intentions elsewhere to be the cause of those other actions. Thus other minds are established. Just as I know from my own case that certain actions are preceded by certain thoughts, so I may analogously infer that similar patterns of speech and behaviour on the part of other people show that they are separate streams of experiences.

According to Dharmakīrti, the non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*) of an entity that is in principle perceptible (*dṛśya*) establishes the absence or non-existence of that entity. This applies to the problem of other minds: from the fact that we do not perceive them it does not follow that they do not exist because they do not fall under the category of the in-principle perceptible. But the case of the Brahminical concept of the Self (*ātman*) is different. Those who believe that the Self is a basic reality characterize it as something that should be uncontroversially knowable. Dharmakīrti and other Buddhists focus on the problems of disentangling the soul from the personality and its experiences. They reason that it is never known, although it is described as the sort of thing that is knowable. This non-apprehension proves its non-existence. The same pattern of reasoning is applied to the notion of Prime Matter (*prakṛti*), which is supposed by Saṃkhyas and Vedāntins to be the ultimate source and underlying cause of all material products. But the fact that we do not see supernatural entities, such as ghosts, does not prove that they do not exist because they are by nature inaccessible to normal perception. This applies to anything inaccessible to perception by virtue of space, time or its nature.

The authority of the Buddha's teachings

Dignāga had subsumed reliable testimony, including scriptural statements about unverifiable matters, under inference as a means of knowing (*pramāṇa*). We infer that the Buddha's teachings are valid because we know that he was reliable and sincere, and above all the teaching works in practice. Dharmakīrti is more radical. He denies that any scripture concerned with the supernatural and suprasensible matters can really have epistemic authority. Human cognitive possibilities are ordinarily restricted to objects that are actually perceptible, in principle perceptible and hence inferable. We have no access to the supernatural. But the religious person must be concerned with matters outside the range of our ordinary cognitive capacities. Where ordinary human authorities are lacking, he must have recourse to some scriptural authority if he is to pursue a way of life that conduces to well-being (*puruṣārtha*). So his situation is that of one who must choose which of the scriptures and which form of religious praxis to follow. The best we can do is to follow the Buddha's advice and adopt what works. We have no means of knowing about the supernatural. All we can do is hope that if a body of scriptures is a reliable guide to living well here, their teaching about what is unverifiable is trustworthy too.

Further reading

Satkari Mookerjee, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux* is about both Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and the many disputes between their school and the Naiyāyika, Mīmāṃsaka and Sāṃkhya realists.

M. Hattori, *Dignaga, On Perception* reconstructs some of the first chapter *Pramāṇa-samuccaya* and covers much more than perception.

R. Hayes, *Dignaga on the Interpretation of Signs*, has translations of chapters II and V of the *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*.

There is a translation and exposition of the *Ālambana-Parīkṣā* in Tola and Dragonetti (2004).

For the text of the *Pramāṇavārttika* see Pandeya (1989). For that of the *Nyāyabindu* see Svami Dvarkadasa Sastri (1994).

Kajiyama (1998) translates a work belonging to the Dignāga-Dharmakīrti tradition.

John Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakirti's Philosophy* contains detailed treatments of ontology, epistemology, logic and the philosophy of language. There is a valuable Appendix of translations. Siderits (1991) deals with the philosophy of language, especially the *apoha* theory, which has attracted much scholarly attention in recent years. The Nyāya response is to be found in Uddyotakara's commentary on Nyāya-Sūtra 2.2.63. (Jha (1984), p. 1034 ff.)

The articles in Tom Tillemans, *Scripture, Logic and Language* combine philosophical acuity and philological expertise.

Vincent Eltschinger, *Penser l'autorité des Écritures* does much more than that and is a mine of information about Dharmakīrti's intellectual context and religious concerns.

Bimal Matilal, *Perception*, relates Buddhist representationalism to modern concerns.

Claus Oetke (1994), *Trairūpya*, puts Dignāga's logic in context, tracing its antecedents and relating it to Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika parallels.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Does the Sautrāntika account of moral responsibility make more sense than that of the Vaibhāṣikas?
2. Is it possible to reconcile atomistic impersonality and moral responsibility?
3. Is Dignāga's theory of language a credible one?
4. Why does Dharmakirti think that truth is the same as successful practice?

5 Nāgārjuna and Madhyamaka Buddhism

Chapter Outline

Nāgārjuna (c. 150–200 A.D.) was a monk trained in the Abhidharma tradition, which tried to delineate the basic structures of reality as understood from the ultimate point of view. He repudiated this enterprise that involved categorizing mental and material phenomena into types of basically real elements (*dharma*) having essential natures (*svabhāva*). Sometimes when Nāgārjuna says that he is not offering a theory of his own, he may have the Abhidharma taxonomical activity in mind! Nāgārjuna holds that supposition that things have unchanging and enduring natures, either at the fundamental or macroscopic level, only encourages us to become attached to them. He thought that the Sarvāstivādins were in effect aspiring to make statements about reality as a whole from a totally objective point of view. Nāgārjuna denies that any such perspective is attainable by us unenlightened beings. There is no point in our even attempting to distinguish between ultimate truth and conventional truth.

His argumentative strategy is to list the possible propositions about some subject-matter. He then examines them and shows that they are inconsistent or lead to erroneous or unwanted conclusions. So he denies all of them. Using this method, he tries to show that our theories and conceptual constructions

cannot capture reality. Since we are not Buddhas, we can attain no grasp of reality as it is in itself.

His most significant philosophical works include the *Madhyamaka-kārikās*, the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and the *Ratnāvalī*. His thought is the subject of a long exegetical tradition that continues to this day. He is sometimes difficult to understand. This is because we do not always know the specific questions to which his statements are the answer. The most important commentator is Candrakīrti (600–650 A.D.) who wrote the *Prasannapadā*. Śāntideva's (700–750) *Bodhicāryāvatara*, describing the Bodhisattva's path to final enlightenment is another influential work.

According to the Abhidharma traditions, the basic elements (*dharma*) have intrinsic natures or essences (*svabhāva*). Intrinsic nature was thought to be timeless, self-sufficient, independent of all else and unchanging. (The last predicate is crucial.) It is the possession of such permanent identity that distinguishes the basic elements from the temporary conditioned aggregates that are the objects of everyday thought and language and grounds the distinction between ultimate reality and conventional reality. Nāgārjuna insists that neither everyday objects nor the *dharmas* can have intrinsic natures. If they had, there would be no change. Reification, the investiture of states of affairs and objects with persisting identities, comes naturally to us. But in truth, everything is empty of intrinsic nature (*svabhāva-śūnya*). Emptiness (*śūnyatā)* must always be understood as meaning 'absence of essence'. It does not mean non-existence. He often says that what we normally consider things, and the concepts with which we carve up reality, are neither real not unreal. That is to say, while our discursive conceptual schemes and the entities that they posit do serve our purposes to an extent, they cannot be the whole truth.

> There are no entities with having intrinsic natures that have arisen either from themselves, or from other things, or from both themselves and others, or from no causes. [MMK 1.1]

> Whether in the cause, or in the conditioning factors, or in a complex of causes and conditions or in something else, nowhere are there found intrinsic natures of entities. This is what we mean by saying that all entities are empty. For instance the sprout is neither in the seed that is its cause, nor in the conditions such as earth, water and air taken singly or collectively, nor is it a separate reality distinct from the causes and conditions. Since there is no intrinsic nature there, the sprout lacks an intrinsic nature. Lacking intrinsic nature means that it is empty. Just as the sprout lacks an intrinsic nature and is empty, so are all entities empty because they lack intrinsic nature. [VV 1]

> The origination of intrinsic nature from causes and conditions is not intelligible. Intrinsic nature produced by causes and conditions would be created. But how could intrinsic nature be created? For intrinsic nature is uncreated and not dependent on anything else. [MMK XV, 1–2]

> Since there is no entity (*dharma*) that has not arisen dependently on others, there is no entity that is not empty of intrinsic nature. [MMK XXIV, 19]

Sometimes Nāgārjuna says that whatever is interdependently originated from causes and conditions is devoid of essential nature. That is true. But he does not mean that lack of essence follows just from the fact of being interdependently originated. The basic point is that there cannot be any essences in the first place.

A typical argument against essence is: suppose that seeing is the essence of the visual faculty, the efficient cause in a visual awareness. The visual faculty cannot see itself. Seeing, the intrinsic nature of the visual faculty, only operates in the presence of a visible object and light, and is consequent to another state of awareness. So the visual faculty's characteristic way of being actually depends upon the co-operation of a variety of conditions. Its nature is not *intrinsic* to it. Another argument is that if everything is impermanent, things cannot have intrinsic natures. If being young is the essence of youth and being old the essence of the elderly, what undergoes the ageing process? There is also a difficulty in formulating the relation between essence and that which has the essence. If essence is a characteristic of its bearer, the bearer must already exist. But if the bearer already is an entity, the notion of essential nature is superfluous. And to return to a point made above, the Abhidharma thinkers appeared to understand essential nature in terms of causal power. But this leaves open the question of what it is that has the power. He thought that they were not really identifying essences, but talking about the dispositions of entities to behave in certain ways.

Nāgārjuna insists that the Abhidharma outlook is contrary to authentic Buddhist teaching about momentariness and non-substantiality according to which there are no unchanging, self-contained and self-sufficient realities. Nāgārjuna says that the Buddhist theory of causation (*pratītya-samutpāda*) means that everything is interdependent and empty of own-nature. He says that entities with essential natures would have to be uncaused or self-created, which is impossible. There cannot be any basic elements with essences or immutable natures. If reality basically consisted of *dharmas* possessing essence, the universe would be static and there would be no changes. If the unsatisfactory

round of existences (*saṃsāra*) had essence or a *fixed* nature, there would be no possibility of *nirvāṇa* and if *nirvāṇa* had essence, there would be no *saṃsāra*.

The Abhidharma distinguished between what is genuinely and substantially real (*dravya-sat*) and what is treated as real or true by convention (or nominally existent) (*prajñapti-sat*). The possession of *svabhāva* was criterial for being genuinely real. Nāgārjuna retains the distinction but does not see it as an ontological one. For him, the distinction is between what we conventionally take to be true (*prajñapti-sat*) and the absolute standard, the standpoint of the omniscient Buddhas. There are not two worlds or two dimensions of reality, one conditioned and the other unconditioned. There is one reality that can be understood from the point of view of enlightenment or from the point of view of some conventional pattern of thinking.

Unenlightened people think of the world as a system of interactions between more or less stable entities that have determinate identities. This is reification or commodification and it is a basic, inherited and shared mistake. Nāgārjuna often compares our conventional outlooks to dreams, illusions and mirages that cannot be classified as real or unreal. Nāgārjuna believes that he is recovering the original teaching of the Buddha because the belief that things and selves have stable, enduring natures only encourages us to become attached to them. Analysis reveals inconsistencies and shows that the conventional world-view cannot be true. The realization that everything is empty of essence puts an end to conceptual construction and reification. We cease to believe that our concepts are capturing an objective reality. Insight into emptiness, the realization that discursive thought cannot reach the truth, leads to a compassionate outlook and mental peace, as one is no longer disappointed by the search for certainties. When we realize that the concept of *svabhāva* is incoherent, we are on the path to enlightenment.

Not only does the *Abhidharma* distinction between conventional reality and ultimate reality (*dharmas* with essential natures) collapse, but also we cannot differentiate between *saṃsāra* as the conditioned realm and *nirvāṇa* as the unconditioned. Nāgārjuna insists that there is not the slightest difference between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. But there is a difference between the ways in which we may understand things.

Nāgārjuna recognizes that the Buddha's teaching about interdependent origination, which is one way of expressing emptiness, was expressed in conventional terms. Indeed, all the Buddha's teachings were. But it would be a mistake to think that because the Buddha used the everyday categories of commonsense, this somehow validates them. The Buddha, in seeking to point

us in the right direction by recommending a way of life that he had found led to enlightenment, had to use some language. He did not say anything positive about *nirvāṇa* because it is not a state, thing or entity.

Paradoxes and inconsistencies in our ways of thinking show that we cannot formulate a complete and correct description of reality 'as it is in itself' independently of any particular perspective. In the *Madhyamaka-kārikās*, Nāgārjuna subjects what realists take to be basic concepts such as those of causality, motion, time, agency, self and substance to criticism. He shows that they are cases of reification and conceptual construction. He thinks that it is pointless to entertain the possibility that our limited conceptual capacities and schemes can capture the ultimate truth. We cannot step outside the world, look at it from the outside and make definitively true statements about it as a whole. We cannot frame an absolute conception of reality and we are wasting our time and spiritual possibilities in seeking to. We cannot formulate a correct and comprehensive ontological theory from a totally objective 'Olympian' point of view, which is what the Abhidharma attempts to do. This is one meaning of what he calls, 'the emptiness of emptiness'. Emptiness is not 'a reality' and there is no essence of emptiness.

Verses from Nāgārjuna's Ratnāvalī

Chapter I

> When we live well following the righteous path, the attainment of the ultimate good follows. Those who practise the perfect life gradually achieve the ultimate good. [3]

> Living well is happiness, and freedom from rebirth is the ultimate good. Trust in the Buddha's teaching and insight are the means to that good. If he has trust, a person may share the path. If he has insight [into emptiness], he knows truly. Of the two, insight is the most important, but trust comes first. [4–5]

> One who does not transgress the path because he is led by his own desires, antagonisms, anxiety and delusions is to be considered trusting. [6]

(The wise person reflects upon the moral value of his actions. He avoids violence and killing, theft and sexual misconduct. He controls his tongue to avoid lying, cruel words and malicious gossip.)

> The unenlightened person is frightened when he hears the teachings '*I* am not', '*I* shall not be' 'Nothing belongs to me nor ever will.' [26]

> The Buddha has said that such fears are the result of a mistaken belief in personal identity and possessiveness. [27]
>
> In reality, it is a mistake to think in terms of 'I' and 'mine' because neither is a reality when one has understood how things really are. [28]
>
> The interactions of the five components (*skandhas*) arise from the sense of personal individuality (*ahaṃkāra*). Personal individuality is not a genuine reality. If the seed of something is unreal, how can its sprout be real? [29]
>
> When it is seen that the components are unreal, the sense of individuality is given up. From the giving up of that, the *skandhas* no longer function. [30]
>
> Just as one sees the reflection of one's face in a mirror, although it is not the real thing, so one conceives individual personality on the basis of the components, although it is not a genuine reality like the reflection of one's face in the mirror. [31–32]
>
> Just as there appears no reflection of one's face without a mirror, so without the five components individual personality does not appear. [33]
>
> While there is grasping at the components, there is the thought 'I'. When there is belief in personal individuality there is *karma* and rebirth. [34]
>
> [Just as a mirage looks like water, but is neither water nor really anything, so the components look like a persisting self but they are not really a self. [54]]
>
> The individual person cannot be *produced* either *by itself*, or *by another*, or *by both itself and another*. Nor is it not eternal. When one realises this, personal individuality vanishes and thence *karma* and rebirth. [37]

The pattern of thought here is applied in all manner of contexts. Nothing can bring itself into being. It would have to exist already in order to do so. If something (in this case, the person) is like that it is a permanent, eternal reality, neither beginning nor ending. But it makes no sense to say that an entity is produced by another. This is because a cause is a cause only in relation to an effect. But if what we are calling the effect does not exist, it is absurd to speak of the cause. If the cause is non-existent, the effect will be too. The formulation 'not by itself and another' follows from the first two.

> When one understands the relation of cause and effect in this way, one realises that the world as a whole cannot be considered as an entity that might or might not exist. [38]

(If the notion of causation belongs to the sphere of our experience in that it is to be understood in terms of relations between finite things, how can we apply

it to the cosmos as a whole and argued that it must come from someone or something?)

> Followers of the *Upaniṣadic* tradition do not worry when they say that familiar worldly life will not exist in the state of liberation. So why are they afraid when we say that there are no absolutely real entities here either? [40]
>
> In the state of release (*mokṣa*) there are neither individual identities nor the five components. But if such a state is dear to you, why do you resist the elimination of the self and the components in this life? [41]
>
> It is not the case that *nirvāṇa* is non-existent. But what could constitute it as an entity? *Nirvāṇa* is beyond the concepts of being and non-being. [42]

(*Nirvāṇa* is not to be understood as some state or place that is concealed by the world. It is a mistake to reify *nirvāṇa* and think of it as *something* that exists as a sort of parallel universe. We return to the original message of the Buddha: *Nirvāṇa* is just the extinction of the fires of greed, hatred and delusion.)

> In brief, the nihilist theory denies that actions have consequences. This false view is immoral and leads to hell. [43]
>
> In brief, the true view is that actions have consequences. This correct view brings merit and rebirth in good states. [44]
>
> When thanks to insight one has ceased to think in terms of what is and what is not, one no longer thinks in terms of merit and demerit. The good say that this is freedom (*mokṣa*) that is beyond good and bad births. [45]

* * *

> If a cause is produced before its effect or simultaneously with it, in reality it is not a cause. The concept of origination is incoherent, either from the absolute or the conventional point of view. [47]

(As we said above: since something is identified as a cause only when it produces an effect, if the relevant factor pre-exists the effect, it cannot be considered as the cause. It can only be considered as the cause after the time when the effect has come into existence and in that case its causal function is superfluous. Nāgārjuna is not saying that there are no entities. He is saying that they are not essentially identifiable as causes and effects.)

> Causal relations may be expressed like this: when A is present, B arises. For instance when we have the idea of long, that of short arises. When something is

> produced there is production of something else – such as radiance after the production of a lamp. [48]
>
> If there is no short, there can be no long. There can be no radiance if no lamp is produced. [49]
>
> When one understands causality like this, it does not lead to nihilism. [50]

This is a classic statement of interdependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda)*. Regularity is just a matter of one thing following another. There is no need to posit invisible and innate causal powers. The point here is that an attempt to understand causality in terms of the transformation of essential natures (or any other metaphysical account such as *satkāryavāda* or *asatkāryavāda*) – is bound to fail and that disillusionment may lead to nihilism.

We move on to the problem of saying anything sensible about the 'ontological status' of the cosmos or about reality as a whole 'as it is in itself':

> The world does not come into existence. It does not go out of existence. It does not remain static even for an instant. How can we say that the world as a whole, to which the categories of past, present and future do not apply, is real? [63]
>
> In truth, since the temporal framework does not apply to either the world or to *nirvāṇa*, how can we specify a real difference between the two? [64]
>
> Given that there is no duration, there is neither origination nor cessation. So how can the world be produced, endure, and cease. [65]

Just as the concept of production cannot apply to the cosmos taken as a whole, nor can that of time, and the correlative notions of origination, endurance and cessation. The cosmos cannot have a starting point in time, if time is a measure of change and times are relations between things in the cosmos.

Next we see a characteristic example of Nāgārjuna's arguments against the Abhidharma:

> How can existence be non-temporal if things are always changing? If it is not the case that things are always changing, how can we account for their variability? [66]
>
> If everything is momentary, how do things get older? But if things are not momentary, in the sense that they remain the same, how do they get older? [68]
>
> We move on to a critique of the metaphysic of essential temporality – the view that existence can really be reductively analysed into basic moments:
>
> If an instant has an end, it must be supposed to have a beginning and a middle. Given that the instant consists of three parts, it cannot be a basic reality. [69]

> Beginnings, middles and ends must be considered like the instant (i.e. similarly reducible, so there is an infinite regress). The condition of being a beginning, a middle and an end does not exist from itself or from something else. [70]
>
> No atom is simple since it has many sides. No atom lacks sides (if it did it could not be connected with others). The ideas of unity and plurality are mutually dependent, as are those of existence and non-existence. [71]

This anticipates criticisms of the notion of atomic aggregation into larger entities. The point is that if atoms do not combine, they cannot be simple or atomic, which is a contradiction. Nāgārjuna is saying that analytic reductionism as practised by the Abhidharmikas fails since we cannot identify basic units. The later idealist argument will be that we cannot make sense of physical matter.

Chapter II

> As the Kadalī tree and all its parts when split down the middle is not anything, likewise with the person when it is analysed into components. [1]
>
> Hence the enlightened ones have said that all *dharmas* lack intrinsic natures. They have ascertained the real nature of the components and seen that they are not substantial. [2]
>
> It makes no sense to affirm or deny substantial identity. [3]
>
> The Buddha has stated that what is observed and what is stated in scriptures is neither true nor false. When there is an argument, there is a counter-argument and neither is absolutely true. [4]
>
> The universe is really beyond the categories of truth and falsity. In truth, we cannot say 'it is' or 'it is not'. [5]
>
> How could the omniscient Buddha affirm of the universe, about which no true statement is possible, that it has an end, or that it is infinite, or that it is really plural or that it is non-differentiated? [6]
>
> People ask how many Buddhas have been, will come and are here now. But the notion of a limit on the number of beings presupposes the three-fold temporal framework. [7]
>
> There is no cause of the growth of the world. Decay is relative to the three-fold temporal framework. [8]
>
> In this consists the depth of the teaching that is a secret from ordinary people: that the world is like a magical illusion is the essence of the teaching of the Buddha. [9]

> An elephant conjured up by magic may appear and it may seem to have a beginning and end. But really it has no beginning and end. [10]
>
> Likewise we see apparent beginnings and ends of things in the world. But in reality there are neither fixed beginnings nor ends. [11]
>
> As a magic elephant comes from nowhere and goes nowhere, being due to a conjuror's pretence, it does not last as a reality. [12]
>
> Likewise the world is like an illusion that comes from nowhere and goes to nowhere. It does not last as a reality since it is only mental delusion. [13]
>
> What then is the meaning of this world organised by the three times? It cannot be said to be nor not to be, except from the conventional standpoint. [14]
>
> Therefore the Buddha did not say whether it is finite or infinite, plural or single. [15]

Refutation of Objections

Nāgārjuna wrote an important work called 'The Refutation of Objections' (*Vigraha-vyāvartanī*) in response to criticism levelled at his method by followers of the Nyāya school. He envisages an opponent who says that the proposition that all entities lack intrinsic natures itself lacks one and thus cannot deny anything. If he admits that the proposition has an intrinsic nature, he is contradicting himself [VV 1–2].

What does it mean to say that a statement lacks an intrinsic nature? When a statement is true, it is an example of language operating as an instrument of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Nāgārjuna is supposing that the opponent holds that the essence of a *pramāṇa* consists in its power (*śakti*) to be an instrumental cause that establishes the truth about things. So the point is that if a *pramāṇa* lacks intrinsic nature, it also lacks that capacity.

Nāgārjuna replies that the opponent has not understood the meaning of emptiness. Entities that are interdependently originated are empty of intrinsic natures because they are dependent upon causes and conditions. His proposition is indeed empty in this sense. But everyday objects, albeit empty, perform their functions successfully. The same applies to his proposition. Essence is not a precondition of functioning in an ever-changing world. The statement has a therapeutic value for people who take it for granted that things have essences.

There is also the objection from the Nyāya school that Nāgārjuna cannot show that all things are empty, since such a demonstration requires that there are valid means of knowing (*pramāṇas*: i.e. perception, inference and

testimony). The objects of the *pramāṇas* must exist too, because one cannot negate what does not exist. The opponent says:

> You deny the reality of things after you have apprehended them by perception, but you also say that the perception by which entities are cognised is not a reality. [VV 5]

Nāgārjuna replies:

> If I apprehended an object by perception or inference or testimony, I could then affirm or deny things about it. But I don't do that so the objection is not sound. [VV 30]
>
> If you hold that objects are established by means of knowing (*pramāṇa*), tell me how you establish those means of knowing. [VV 31]
>
> If the *pramāṇas* are established by other *pramāṇas*, there is an infinite regress. There is neither beginning, nor middle nor end. [VV 32]
>
> If you think that *pramāṇas* are established without *pramāṇas*, you have abandoned your own doctrine. [VV 33]
>
> A pramāṇa cannot establish itself, because something cannot exercise its characteristic activity upon itself. [VV 34–39]
>
> If the means of knowing are self-established, they are established independently of the objects known. Self-establishment does not require anything else. [VV 40]
>
> If you think that the means of knowing are established independently of the objects known, then those means of knowing are not means of knowing about anything. [VV 41]
>
> If the *pramāṇas* are established only in relation to the objects known, the objects known are not established by the *pramāṇas*. [VV 43]
>
> If the objects known are established independently of the means of knowing, what is the point in seeking to establish the *pramāṇas*? [VV 44]
>
> If you hold that the objects of knowing are established by the means of knowing and that the means of knowing are established by the objects of knowing, you cannot establish either. [VV 46]
>
> If the *pramāṇas* are established by the objects known, and if those objects have to be established by *pramāṇas*, then, because the *pramāṇas* have not been established, the objects have not been established either. So how will the objects known establish the means of knowing?' [VV 48]

Further reading

David Burton's *Emptiness Appraised* is the best starting point. Chapter III of Paul Williams's *Mahāyāna Buddhism* is helpful. His *Altruism and Reality* is mostly about the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. See especially Chapter V.

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is lucidly translated in Crosby and Skilton (1996).

Bhattacharya (1998) translates the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. Lindtner (1982) contains much helpful explanatory material, as well as texts and some translations. The most readable translations of the *Madhyamakakārikās* are those by Jay Garfield (1995) and Frederick Streng (1967). Chapters VI–IX of Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity* (2003), sees emptiness as a global form of anti-realism and offers much food for thought.

Hahn (1982) has the text of the *Ratnāvalī*.

For engagement with Nyāya over the question of the *pramāṇas* see especially Uddyotakara's commentary on Nyāya-Sūtra 2.1.8–19. This is translated in Jha (1984), p. 606ff.

Bimal Matilal's 'Logical Illumination of Indian Mysticism' (Matilal, 2002) is stimulating.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Why does Nāgārjuna think that the Abhidharma distinction between the absolute and conventional dimensions of reality collapses?
2. Is Nāgārjuna entitled to make any truth-claims?

6 'Mind-Only': Yogācāra Buddhism

Chapter Outline

Some Buddhists espouse an idealist form of philosophy in that they deny that there are any material or physical realities existing independently of minds. There are neither selves nor an external world but only constructs of selfhood, agency and objectivity arising from the flux of momentary self-aware thoughts and feelings. We must bear in mind here that the philosophers were also monks, practising profound meditation every day. The point is reflected in the designation of this tradition as 'Yogācāra', which means, 'the practice of yoga'. (Other names include 'Citta-mātra', which means 'mind-only' and 'Vijñāna-vāda' or 'consciousness theory'.) Meditation often involves experiencing what are purely thought-forms as if about external realities. It is not surprising that such people should be especially open to the possibility that what we ordinarily take to be external realities are but projections of consciousness.

The Buddhist idealists have a strong sense that the ways in which we experience what we unenlightened beings call the external world is conditioned by personal and subjective factors. Our mind-set or world-view determines how we see the world. What makes one person's perception of a state of affairs different

from that of another is the moods, emotions and memories that one brings to bear in the circumstances. This is illustrated by the point that when hungry ghosts see a body of water, they see a mass of pus. Humans see it as a crystal stream and drink from it. Such observations about the subjective constitution of experience do not in themselves license any conclusions about the ontological status of the physical world. But we shall see that these Buddhists present arguments against the intelligibility of the concept of material substance.

The central figure here is Vasubandhu who lived during the period c. 350–400 A.D. Trained in Sarvāstivāda methods of analysis and meditation, he wrote a work called the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* which is a critical survey from a Sautrāntika point of view of Buddhist realist schools. Another work is the *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, which is a Sautrāntika critique of realist notions of how *karma* operates, and an attempt to reconcile atomistic impersonality with moral responsibility and consequentiality. It appears that he moved from a representationalist to an idealist philosophical position and wrote the *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra*, the *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, the *Viṃśatikā* and the *Triṃśikā* from that point of view. His commentator Sthiramati lived around 550 A.D.

The Sautrāntika representationalists think that it makes sense to suppose that most of our perceptions have external causes. Mental contents are representations (*ākāra*) caused by a world outside the mind to which they bear some relation. That relation is not one of mirroring or picturing since they hold that the external world really consists of a flux of unique momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*) and does not feature as such in the content of awareness. They posit an external world on the basis of the inference that there has to be something that causes those experiences over whose occurrence we have no control (*bāhyārtha-anumeya*), not as a result of direct acquaintance (*bāhyārtha-pratyakṣa*). We can see how easily this may encourage an idealist outlook. The gulf between what is supposedly given in experience and its interpretation in concepts, thinking and judging (an interpretation that conceals rather than discloses) is just too wide. If we are not directly acquainted with objects in the world, and if conceptual and descriptive thinking does not reach out to the world, and if the existence of that world can only be certified by inference (itself a mental activity), why suppose that there is an extra-mental physical dimension to reality? If the manifest content of experience is determined by our thoughts rather than by objects in the world, we might wonder what sense can be given to the notion of a mind-independent reality. Surely it is falling out of the picture. If experience of a hypothetical given – the amorphous flux of ineffable particulars – does not express that

given as such but is posited as something that has a purely instrumental causal role in the genesis of discursive thinking, actually concealing the true nature of things, it is not obvious that experiences of such a given need be postulated at all. Considerations like these (whose influence is apparent in Dignāga's *Ālambana-Parīkṣā*) seem to be the impetus behind Vasubandhu's move towards idealism or the view that only the mental factors of existence (*vijñaptis*) are real. Vasubandhu came to reject the Sautrāntika view that we can validly infer that there is an extra-mental reality as the cause of our perceptual sensations. We do not need to posit a material dimension of reality in order to explain the character of experiences, whose occurrence can be explainedby the revival of traces of prior experiences (*vāsanā* or *saṃskāra*) within a stream. There is an argument from economy: it is always better to assume one thing than to assume many. It is better to postulate potent mental traces of experiences than to posit external objects. (Perhaps he thought that the maxim that 'when something is seen, there is no need to postulate the unseen' begs the question.) He argued against the very coherence of the notion of material substance. He rejected the Vaibhāṣhika view that we are directly aware of objects made up of real physical atoms. Atoms are partless and indivisible. As such they cannot join together. But if we insist that atoms come together, they must have parts. If they coalesce, there will be no increase in extent: if they have no dimension, they cannot combine to form larger objects. If they have dimension, they will be divisible and this undermines atomism. If there are no atoms there cannot be any wholes distinct from their parts. The Vaibhāṣika realists hold that all mental acts have existent objects external to the mind. They say that to be is to cause an awareness: anything that is the referent of an awareness exists. Vasubandhu argues that dreams and hallucinations show that this is not true. Perceptions do not *necessarily* depend upon mind-independent realities.

We might suppose that as well as objects outside the mind, there is also spatio-temporal determination. Vasubandhu replies that experience of such determination also occurs in dreams. In response to the argument that it appears that there are many minds experiencing the same objective environment, Vasubandhu appeals to the Buddhist notions of hells, which are shared hallucinations.

Vasubandhu thinks that individual events in a mental series are aware of themselves. An awareness is simultaneously and in virtue of the same act self-cognized, just as a lamp illuminates itself while illuminating an object. This tenet of the reflexivity of mental events is central to the idealist outlook: It shows that an idea can be the object of another idea and that there is no need to posit physical objects as the causes of our thoughts. Moreover, the reflexivity

of each individual mental event dispenses with the need for an independent consciousness, an observer-principle with a perspective on mental states.

Like all Buddhists, Vasubandhu believes that it is the intentional actions of sentient beings that are responsible for the diversity and organization of the cosmos, which exists to be the environment in which the consequences of actions are to be experienced. The Abhidharma thinkers understand this realm to be basically constituted by the material and mental elements of existence. The idealists reject the category of material elements and hold that think that the elements of existence are only the mental ones. Lives are streams of ideas (*vijñapti*) ever emerging from a mental storehouse of vestiges (*ālaya-vijñāna*) impressed by previous actions. These self-conscious ideas may mistakenly conceive themselves as individual subjectivities, viewing ideas as other than themselves and as constituting other streams.

Vasubandhu's view is that unenlightened people lead an enchanted life contaminated by selfish attachments, aversions and delusions. Enlightened people who are detached from the objects of sense realize that what we call the world is a fabric of appearances. They are free from desires, aversions and delusions; in particular the delusion that one is fundamentally an enduring, substantial soul, a 'further fact' over and above the stream of one's psycho-physical continuity. Awareness of a mind-independent physical world is the product of habitual construction by ideas projecting themselves as if external. People are individualized not through relations to external circumstances but by a 'mind-set' consisting of their inherited traits, attitudes, moods, emotions and memories. Deconstruction of such factors encourages detachment from everyday experience.

Our everyday environment and ways of life are considered a mirage concealing authentic reality. That reality is consciousness from which arises phenomenal reality, the environments experienced by sentient beings. For the first moment of consciousness he adopts the tradition's expression 'the construction of phenomena' (*abhūta-parikalpa*), which means the dichotomization of consciousness into subjects and objects of awareness (*grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpa*).

The unenlightened mind is veiled by moral, emotional and intellectual defects (*kleśa*), foremost among which are cravings, antagonisms and failures in understanding. Defects spring from seeds embedded in streams of consciousness. They suppress the pure factors that are conducive to salvation and whose cultivation promotes a *transformation of mind* and conduct. The Buddhist path, understanding, meditation and morality, is intended to counteract the impure factors. The aspirant to enlightenment must focus attention upon eliminating impurities. Internalization of the teaching that the elements lack fixed and enduring identities (*dharma-nairātmya*) produces

a non-discursive, direct intuition into the nature of unconditioned reality in which subject-object dichotomy disappears. Intensification of this intuition destroys all the defects, together with their seeds, in a stream of experience.

We have seen the basic tenet that what are ordinarily considered to be material objects do not exist independently of awareness. The denial of the subject-object-relation repudiates the outlook that we are individual subjects receiving sensory impressions from a realm of material objects that are entities in their own right independently of constructive consciousness. He thinks that no sense can be made of the 'realist' view that the perceiving mind confronts an independently existing domain of physical objects. This is not just because thinking about physical reality may be contrary to genuine 'spirituality' but because 'atomism' as an account of a purportedly material domain external to minds is incoherent. Like all Buddhist thinkers, he aims to provide a rationale for why we should not be self-centred. A structural feature of the self-centred mentality is that it thinks in terms of discrete subjects and objects. There is an internal relation between this mentality and supposing that people and things have timeless essences, permanent identities or unchanging natures. It does not matter whether what are considered objects are mental or physical. The real point of 'perceptions-only' (*vijñapti-mātra*) is to help us to internalize and act upon the truth that there are no individual subjects of awareness confronting things, and each other as objects. The notion of the apprehending subject is relative to that of there being mind-independent entities. Once it is realised that what we think of as objects are not stable external entities, our everyday understanding of cognition is transformed. Since subject and object are interdependent, the subjective element is also eliminated. In short, he wants to undermine thinking in terms of the pervasive subject-object polarity (*grāhya-grāhaka-bhāva*, literally grasped-grasper relation) which conditions our outlook on life.

Extracts from Vasubandhu's 'Twenty Verses Proving that only Mental Phenomena are Real' (*Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi*)

According to Mahāyāna, it is established that the three realms are only mental (*vijñapti-mātra*). The words *cittam* (mind), *manas*, *vijñāna* and *vijñapti* are synonyms. *Cittam* includes all mental events (*caitta*). 'Only' excludes material forms.

If awareness of objects required causation by external objects, dreams and delusions would not be possible. Consciousness appears in the guise of external perceptible objects. Ideas of objects are sufficient. They arise from a sub-conscious store of mental seeds and traces of prior experiences. The Abhidharmikas says that all cognitions have real objects. The first verse responds to this by saying that some thoughts have unreal objects. The point is that reference to an extra-mental feature is not a necessary feature of awareness. If some thoughts can have significance in the absence of any external object, the question arises whether we are right to assume that there are really any extra-mental items.

1. All this is just awareness, because there is manifestation of non-existent objects – as when a visually impaired person sees non-existent cobwebs etc.

Here the realist opponent says:

2. If ideas are not caused by external objects, they would not be determined by time and place, there would be no shared experiences, and they would not have effects.

If there could be awareness of colour and shape in the absence of an external object with colour and shape, it has not been caused by an external object. So why is it produced at a specific place and not anywhere? And why does it arise at that place at a specific time and not always?

And why is it produced in the streams of experience of all who are present at that time and place and not just in one, just as the illusory appearances occur in the stream of the visually impaired and not in others?

And why are the hairs and bees seen by the visually impaired are not causally effective? Things seen in dreams do not perform the functions of their counterparts in the waking state. Fictional cities don't do anything because they do not exist.

Hence, in the absence of external objects, spatio-temporal determination, sharing of experiences and causally efficacy are unintelligible.

3. Spatio-temporal determination is established in dreams; evil spirits (*pretas*) in immaterial hells share experiences for they all see rivers of pus.

In dreams, things are seen at specific places and times. So spatio-temporal determination is established without external objects. Beings in hell, who are there because of similar maturation of *karma*, all see a river of pus. Thus is there shared experience although the objects of awareness are not externally existing.

4. [The real is the causally effective] and there is production of effects as in wet dreams. Again in the case of hell, all see the hell-guards and are punished by them.

In erotic dreams there is emission of semen without intercourse. All the denizens of hell suffer, although the guards be unreal, as a consequence of the maturation of parallel karma.

9. If you allow that the experiences of individuals in hell are the products of purely mental karmic traces, why not admit that this applies to all experiences?

10. The truth is that persons lack permanent identity. Put another way, the teaching that everything is ideas leads to internalization of the truth that there are no *dharmas* with permanent identities.

Material substance is impossible because:

11. The object in awareness is a not a single whole. It is not a multiple composed of many atoms. Nor is it a conglomeration of atoms. This is because the atoms do not exist.

12. Given its simultaneous connection with six other atoms, the atom would have six parts. If the six occupy the same place, they would have the same mass as one.

13–15 develop the refutation of the conglomeration theory.

Thirty verses on consciousness

Vasubandhu also wrote a short treatise, called the Triṃśikā or 'Thirty Verses', which is a reflection upon the structure of consciousness and the phenomenology of experience. He begins by saying that the words 'identity' (*ātman*) and 'element of existence' (*dharma*) are variously applied to what are modifications of consciousness (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*). There are three types of such modification and they constitute an unenlightened mode of living.

The first is the fruition (*vipāka*) of 'seeds' of experiences, deposited in the store-consciousness or receptive mind (*ālaya-vijñānam*) by previous actions occurring in a stream. This is called the store-consciousness. It contains experiences in the form of implicit ideas. The receptive mind is always associated with mental phenomena (*caitta*) including sensations, perceptions, attentiveness, feelings, and intentions. Enlightenment is a transformation of the receptive mind. [3–5a]

The second is thinking about or in terms of ideas (*mano-vijñānam*) belonging to the inherited repository of ideas. This is always polluted and corrupted by four defects: belief that there is a permanent self (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*), delusions about oneself (*ātma-moha*), an exaggerated sense of one's importance (*ātma-māna*), and self-love (*ātma-sneha*). This egocentric mental mode is a function of the mental phenomena. It is transcended in enlightened being. [5b–7]

The third modality is perceptual cognitions of objects (*vijñapti-viṣaya*). These perceptions are conditioned by a range of mental phenomena: sensation, desire, memory, and reflection. They may be affected by either virtuous factors such as

faith, shame, lack of greed, hostility and delusions, energy and non-violence or by harmful ones. [8–14]

The transformations of consciousness are mental creations (*vikalpa*). What is thus constructed does not really exist independently. Everything is really just ideas. [17] The emergent transformations of consciousness influence one another and generate a conceptual scheme or 'worldview'. Thanks to the ongoing revival of vestiges of prior actions, there is a constant supply of new experiences. [18–19]

What commonsense regards as entities or objects (*vastu*) are in fact constructed by the mind. Such constructed natures (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) do not exist in their own right. [20]

Mental construction is produced by causes and conditions and hence its nature is dependent or conditioned (*paratantra*). But in its original, pristine self-sufficient state, mind is not conditioned by causes. This unconditioned mode is called its perfection (*niṣpanna*). [21]

It is rationally undecidable whether the unconditioned mind is the same as or different from the conditioned mind. This is because the conditioned mind, the process of mental construction, is just a feature, qua activity, of the unconditioned mind. Furthermore, as long as the conditioned state is not understood as such, we can have no conception of their being an unconditioned state. Immersed *in* the unenlightened mode of awareness, there is no possibility of the conditioned mind's realising its limited nature out of its own resources. It simply lacks the ability to attain an external, neutral perspective upon itself. [22]

What are called the three natures are not intrinsically determined. [23]

It is a mistake to attribute a self-sufficient intrinsic identity (*svabhāva*) to either the products of mental creation, to the process of mental creation or to the unconditioned mind. [24]

The permanent and true nature of the elements is purely mental. [25]

As long as one does not realize that only the mental elements of existence are real, the subject-object mentality persists. [26]

Just confronting an object and thinking 'this is merely an idea' is not to experience the mind-only state. [27]

When thought does not apprehend any objective support (*ālambana*), then it is established in the mind-only state. In the absence of objects of thought, there is no grasping. [28]

This is supernatural direct intuition, beyond the mind (*citta*), beyond thinking.

This is the transformation of the receptive mind, immune from afflictions and obscurations. [29]

Vasubandhu and Sthiramati on 'The Construction of Phenomena'

What we see here is the view that the world of our experience is nothing more than the interplay of ideas projecting themselves as if referring to external things. But there are no realities other than ideas and really no subjects of experience to which those ideas belong. A line of idealist thought, traced back to a revelation by the Bodhisattva Maitreya to Vasubandhu's brother Asaṅga, says that the conditioned realm of our experience manifests 'the mental construction of the unreal' (*abhūta-parikalpa*). The word '*bhūta*' means reality or 'a reality'. The negative prefix 'a' is probably being used in the sense of 'mistaken for'. So *abhūta* actually has a more subtle meaning than 'unreal' or 'non-existent'. What it means is 'what is mistaken for reality'. On this reading, the 'mental creation of what is mistaken for reality' means the same as *bhāva-kalpanā* or 'the imaginative construction of entities' where 'entity' means a stable object (or subject) with intrinsic properties whose identity is determined independently of its relations to others. So *abhūta-parikalpa* means that what we ordinarily understand and treat as objects and subjects are abstractions from a matrix of relations. Also constructed and not authentically real is the dichotomy of subject and the subject (*grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpa*). The notion of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is taken to mean falsity of the subject-object polarity that structures our unenlightened understanding. Sthiramati appears to move towards a kind of absolute idealism, according to which everything is a manifestation of an unconditioned (*śūnyatā*) fundamental reality that is the ultimate substrate of the process called the 'Construction of Phenomena' (*abhūta-parikalpa*). The unconditioned reality is the *precondition* of the experiences of subjectivity and objectivity, of minds and things. As such, it transcends them and is neither mental nor physical while manifesting itself as both.

Illustrative extracts from Sthiramati's Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā

> The construction of phenomena (*abhūta-parikalpa*) exists. Duality is not found there. The Unconditioned (*śūnyatā*) is real, and the construction of phenomena depends upon it. [1.verse 2, page 9]

Vasubandhu says that '*abhūta-parikalpa*' means the distinction between cognising subject and objects grasped.

Sthiramati begins by saying that the stanza is directed against the view of the Mādhyamikas that none of the elements of existence (*dharma*) are realities. In order to repudiate this universal denial it is said that 'the construction of phenomena' exists.

– But does not this contradict the Buddhist scriptures to the effect that *all* the elements of existence are empty?

There is no contradiction because it says that 'duality is not found there'. This means that the construction of phenomena is *empty* of the distinction between knowing subjects and objects known. It does not mean that the Absolute is void of intrinsic nature.

– But if duality is never real, like the hare's horn, the constructor of phenomena will be the only true reality. This entails that the Unconditioned is not a reality.

No, because the scripture says 'Emptiness is real'. Emptiness here means the absence of the opposition between subject and object in the constructor of phenomena, not the non-existence of the Unconditioned Reality. [page 10]

Sthiramati now turns his attention to the Sarvāstivādin view that in addition to minds and mental acts, material objects are also objective realities. The statement that the construction of phenomena really exists is intended to refute this. There is no matter that is independent of this process. This is why the text says, 'there is no duality there' meaning that the construction of phenomena is neither the apprehender of anything, nor is it apprehended by anyone. Moreover, it is simple reality, void of subjects and objects.

Material objects are not grasped independently of awareness. As in dreams and hallucinations, consciousness represents material objects. If A is the cause of B, it is illogical that B occurs in the absence of A. [If material objects are required as the causes of ideas, in the absence of the former the latter would not occur. But they do.] Hence consciousness does not require external objective supports [to represent objects]. Consciousness represents objects as if external when subconscious 'seeds' [in the storehouse of ideas] come to fruition.

If there are no objects, there are no subjects. There are no objects subsisting independently of the construction of phenomena.

– But if there is nothing to be grasped, there can be no liberation because there would be no transcendental reality.

This is why the text says, 'the Unconditioned exists'. The Unconditioned is the transcendental reality. It is free from the subject-object duality. It is the foundation of the construction of phenomena. So liberation is possible.

– But if the Absolute is the basis of the construction of phenomena, why it is not apprehended?

It is not apprehended because it is concealed by the construction of phenomena, not because it does not exist.

The assertion that the construction of phenomena exists can be taken as meaning that the elements of existence are modifications of consciousness.

The denial of duality can be directed against the Sarvāstivādin view that objects both appear and exist in their own right independently of the construction of phenomena. [page 11]

Some think that the denial of duality is just nonsense. Others think that the emptiness of the elements means just that there is no controlling inner soul.

To counter the denial that there is an ultimate reality, the scripture states that the Unconditioned exists.

– But if the Unconditioned is the foundation of the construction of phenomena, there is the entailment that liberation would happen for everyone without effort.

No – because the Unconditioned is concealed by the process of the construction of phenomena. Liberation is not possible until the Unconditioned is disclosed through the great effort involved in purification of the mind.

– But if the subject-object duality is unreal, why does the deluded world think that it exists?

The duality is like a mass hallucination produced by the construction of phenomena. The Unconditioned reality is defined as that which is free from subject and object.

– But what is the construction of phenomena?

In general terms, it is mind and the whole range of mental acts in the three spheres of existence, past, present and future, the complex of causes and effects constituting beginningless *saṃsāra* and lasting until *nirvāṇa* [page 12]. Specifically, it is the subject-object polarity (*grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpa*). The object-pole is consciousness representing things and people. The subject-pole is representations in consciousness of a self and its perceptions. An example of an object apprehended would be something with colour, shape and size. An example of a subject would be a visual perception. The subject-object polarity is not intrinsic to the construction of phenomena. Unenlightened people do not understand the nature of the Unconditioned Reality because it is concealed from us. But the enlightened being (*Bodhisattva*) correctly discerns that the construction of phenomena is empty of

the subject-object polarity. After the experience of duality has been superseded, the unconditioned reality and the construction of phenomena remain. The *Bodhisattva* intuits them as they are without any mistaken superimposition.

Hence everything is taught as neither empty nor as non-empty. Because of existence, non-existence and existence, this is the Middle Path. (1.verse 3 page 13)

Vasubandhu: The Unconditioned and the Construction of phenomena are not empty but the duality of subject and object is. Everything conditioned is called the construction of phenomena: the Unconditioned is called Emptiness. The construction of phenomena is real. The subject-object duality is not real. The Unconditioned is the substrate of the construction of phenomena and the construction of phenomena depends upon it.

Sthiramati: The construction of phenomena is conditioned when it is externally related to causes and conditions. Emptiness is unconditioned because it never related to causes and conditions.

Consciousness (*vijnāna*) generates projections (*pratibhāsa*)of objects, living beings, selves and perceptions. Because the objects of these ideas are unreal, the ideas are not real either. (1. verse 4. page 14)

Vasubandhu: The projection of objects means colours and shapes etc. The projection of living beings means the sense faculties in one's own and other experiential streams. The projection of self means the corrupt mind that posits a permanent self. The projection of perceptions means the six modes of sense-based awareness. The unreality of objects means that they do not exist independently of consciousness. In this sense the ideas of them are false.

Sthiramati: It has been taught that the construction of phenomena that is empty of subject and object is real. The verse explains how the sense-faculties, objects and perceptions are related to it.

[page 15] By statements that the construction exists, we learn that it is a reality but nothing about its nature. We do not understand the reason for our instinctive adherence to the subject-object polarity despite the unreality of duality. That is why the verse indicates that the intrinsic nature of the construction of phenomena is consciousness. The basis of our instinctive adherence to the subject-object mentality is the projection of objects and living beings etc. Ideas of inanimate objects, living beings, polluted minds and sense-based perceptions are maturations of seeds, vestiges of prior intentional actions, in the storehouse consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). These specific transformations of karmic potencies create the different modes of phenomenal existence.

– But why does mind represent things as if they were external to it? We would never mistake a post for a man if there were no men.

When the mind forms representations of objects, unenlightened people habitually assume that the objects exist independently of consciousness. It is like people with cataracts seeing cobwebs. In order to free people from that instinctive attachment to objectivity, it is said that the representations of objects are only subjective perceptions and lack reality as do the cobwebs. Thus it has been said that the various manifestations regarded as constituting an objective domain depend upon the construction of phenomena.

Coloured things with size and shape, sounds, smells, flavours and textures are really just internal to the mind. Likewise with our ideas of sentient beings and the thinking self.

[page 16] Perceptions appear to grasp external objects but the truth is that there are no external objects corresponding to them.

– But common sense says that the objects of perception and the sense faculties are mind-independent realities. Why should we reject this in favour of idealism?

There are many cases of awareness in the absence of real external objects, for example, dreams, hallucinations, projections in meditation. If the production of awareness were causally dependent upon external objects, ideas could not occur in the absence of the latter and their content could not be different from the things that have produced them [so we would see water-atoms and light waves, not rainbows].

Hence, we say that every perception representing things and living beings arises without any external objects. If there are no real objects, the ideas of the self and its perceptions are not genuine either, since the two are co-dependent. Although the subject-object polarity is unreal, the consciousness that posits it is real.

* * *

The construction of phenomena can be understood under three descriptions:

It is called the Constructed nature when there are objects, the Dependent nature because of the construction of phenomena, and the Perfected nature when there is no duality. (1. Verse 6. Page 18)

Vasubandhu: The nature that is conceptually constructed (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) is the world of objects. The dependent nature (*paratantra-svabhāva*) is the construction of phenomena. The perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*) means the unreality of the subject-object polarity.

Sthiramati: It is meant here that the construction of phenomena is in itself devoid of the subject-object polarity. Mentally constructed means that subject and object are treated as if truly existing, although unreal because they lack intrinsic natures as such. Dependent means what is produced from causes and

conditions. The perfected nature is empty of duality produced by the mind. It is unconditioned and changeless.

The subject-object polarity does not really belong to the construction of phenomena, which is called the dependent nature when it is subject to causes and conditions. It is called constructed when it appears under the form of subject and object which do not really exist there. It is perfected when those conditions do not obtain. In this way, three natures are attributed to the construction of phenomena.

[pages 20–21] Idealist objections to the Sautrāntika representationalists:

They say that the objective support (*ālambana-pratyaya*) of awareness is some instantaneous reality. It effects a representation of its form in awareness. They say that the objective realities that we perceive are either particular atoms or clusters of atoms. But this is unsatisfactory because there are no such atoms. But in any case, what we perceive are macroscopic objects and not atoms or clusters of atoms. There surely cannot be such a mismatch between the contents of our mental representations and their objective supports.

Moreover, they themselves say that compounds or wholes are purely nominal or conceptual existents (*prajñapti-sat*). How then can they be the causes of perceptions if they are themselves constructs out of experiences of the given?

Further reading

Text and translation of the 'Twenty Verses' in Tola and Dragonetti (2004) and Wood (1991). For the 'Thirty Verses' see Wood. For Sthiramati's *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā*, I have used Pandeya (1989). The first book is interpreted with informative notes in Stcherbatsky (1970).

Chapter IV of Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism* (1989) is enlightening.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Why do the idealists deny the reality of matter? Is it just because they want to encourage us to be detached from things?
2. Has Vasubandhu succeeded in showing that there is no physical reality?

7 Sāṃkhya and Yoga

Chapter Outline

The Sāṃkhya vision

Sāṃkhya is one of the six orthodox Brahminical Hindu systems of salvation or 'visions' (*darśana*), and it is closely associated with the *Yoga* system of spiritual development. Although this tradition is ancient, its basic text is the *Sāṃkhya-Kārikās* of *Īśvarakṛṣṇa* (c. 400–500 A.D.) upon which there are commentaries including the *Yuktidīpikā* (c. 650 A.D.) and the *Tattvakaumudi* by Vācaspati Miśra (c. 841 or 976 A.D.). *Sāṃkhya* is basically a non-theistic, world-renunciatory and gnostic outlook, rather than a religion for the person immersed in daily life and ritual religion. Its goal is the elimination of suffering by the eradication of its ultimate cause. Religious practices, such as rituals and austerities, can only afford a temporary relief from suffering. What is required is discriminative understanding of the difference between the conscious subject, and material nature and its manifestations. In other words, we need to understand that the active embodied person is alienated from its true identity, which is but reflexive static conscious subjectivity. The goal is 'isolation' or freedom from determination by natural causal processes.

Sāṃkhya posits a dualism of souls and matter. There is an infinity of souls (*puruṣa*), which are self-contained and inactive self-aware conscious monads whose true mode of existence is beyond space, time and matter. Souls are merely disinterested observers, and most definitely not active participants in the sphere of becoming. Somehow, some of these souls have become entangled in the material environment, including individual personality and the body. Sāṃkhya and Yoga aim to free the soul from this imprisonment by matter and rebirth.

Souls have become confused with limited and basically material forms. When there is an association between what is merely a static conscious monad and the material mind (*buddhi*), the latter is illuminated, irradiated by the light of consciousness and becomes as-if conscious [SK 20]. The confusion is compounded when the activity of the *buddhi* is mistakenly attributed to the inactive soul. Thus we have the origins of the individual person and the series of births marked by suffering. But the souls are really always purely passive spectators of human experiences, abiding in splendid isolation, each illuminated only by its own consciousness. It is, however, a basic tenet of Sāṃkhya that the experiences deriving from involvement with matter which bind the soul also operates for the sake of its release (SK 21).

The other pole of the dualism is Primal Matter (*pradhāna* or *mūla prakṛti*). It is beginningless and ever-changing. The latter spontaneously transforms itself (*pariṇāma*) into the real cosmos of material and psychological phenomena. The best we can say is that this just happens. There is no divinity initiating or superintending the process.

Prime Matter is said to consist of three strands (*guṇa*): *sattva* (goodness and light), *rajas* (dynamic energy) and *tamas* (heavy and dark). (The *Yuktidīpikā* interprets the triad as standing for happiness, distress and delusion.) Before the manifestation of the cosmos, they are in a state of equilibrium, cancelling out one another's properties. Their 'mere existence' is said to prompt the transformation of material nature. Matter (*prakṛti*) transforms for the sake of the human souls so that they have experiences that lead them to realize the difference between soul and matter. Opponents ask how an unconscious cause can act for the sake of anything, let alone produce specific and organized realities. The Sāṃkhya position, however, is that the existence of the cosmos call for explanation. The world consists of active and complex realities made of parts. Each has its own purpose and we should assume a purpose for the totality. They espouse a principle that *composite* entities exist for the sake of something else (*parārtha*) that is different in nature from them. So it is

concluded that physical entities exist for the sake of conscious souls.

> Just as the unconscious milk functions for the nourishment of the calf, so matter functions for the sake of the liberation of the soul (*puruṣa*). [SK 57]
>
> No *puruṣa* is really bound or liberated or reborn. Only matter in her various transformations is bound etc. [SK 62]
>
> Through repeated meditation on the nature of the manifest world, there arises the intuitive insight that the *puruṣa* is not the individual personality and whatever it identifies with. [SK 64]

Primal Matter evolves to produce the basic material and psychological realities *tattva* – i.e. *buddhi* (mind/intellect); *ahaṃkara* (one's sense of personality; *manas* (the co-ordinator of the separate sense-faculties and their deliverances); the five sense-faculties (*indriya*); physical organs; the essences of sounds, touch, colours, tastes and smells; and the gross elements – space, air, fire, water and earth which make up physical objects). These products contain the *guṇas* in differing proportions and compose the world we inhabit.

Individual objects are collections of qualities (*guṇa-saṃdrava*) such as colours, shapes, textures, tastes and smells. The Sāṃkhyas reject the Nyāya view that there is a separate property-possessor (*dharmin*) that is distinct from the conglomeration of properties. They think that once we have listed, as it were, all the properties of an entity, there is no *extra* factor called the substrate. Such would be what is sometimes called a 'bare particular' or an entity without properties, and that makes no sense. It has indeed been observed that the notion that the ultimate subject of predication should be something without properties is an idea so absurd that only philosophers could have come up with it.

All that is required for the substantial unity of entities over time is that they be integrated in a suitable way. As the *Yuktidīpikā* puts it, 'When an entity without departing from its nature loses an earlier property and receives a new one, that is called modification (*pariṇāma*)' (YD pp. 111 and 163]. This is true to experience. People and things change all the time and still remain identifiably the same. There can only be change, rather than replacement, if something stays the same.

Causal processes

Saṃkhya propounds a theory of causation termed *satkārya-vāda* which says that future products pre-exist in a potential state in their underlying,

substrative causes (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) prior to their actualization or manifestation (*abhivyakti*) as entities identifiable by their specific names and forms. Milk transforms into yoghurt. Milk is the underlying cause or substrate and yoghurt emerges as a product (*kārya*) from it. Pots are transformations of the clay that is their substrative cause and which their individual forms have implicitly pre-existed. Here the causal process involves a modification (*pariṇāma*) of a stable underlying reality and not the generation of a totally novel product. Hence there is a strong ontological link between the emergent effect and its causal substrate. We shall see the importance of this emanative model of cosmic causality for those forms of Vedānta that see the cosmos of souls and matter as real transformations of the divine being.

The Sāṃkhya theory of causation develops in opposition to that of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas. That position is called *asatkārya-vāda* or 'the production of something new'**.** This says that prior to origination, the effect did not exist in its underlying cause but is a totally new product, different from the already existent basic elements out of which it is made. They reject the category of potentiality, holding that only what is actual and concrete is real and can cause something else. Causation is not the actualization of what was potential but the generation, through re-arrangement, of new entities out of already existent factors. A cause is defined as a necessary prior condition of an effect. There are three factors in a causal complex such as the manufacture of a cloth by a weaver out of threads: the substrative or underlying cause (*samavāyi-kāraṇa*) which is always a type of substance (*dravya*) – e.g. the threads comprising the cloth (the new whole – *avayavin*); the non-inherent cause (*asamavāyin*) which is always a quality (*guṇa*) or activity (*karma*) – e.g. the weaving and colour of the threads; the efficient or instrumental cause (*nimitta*) – e.g. the shuttle and other instruments. The weaver is the agent cause. The products of causal processes are integrated wholes (*avayavin*). The whole is a new creation with its own identity, over and above the sum of the parts in which it inheres. The whole entity cannot exist without the parts, but the parts can exist without the whole. It is distinct from the parts since it manifests a single specific universal. An individual object must be the substrate of a universal; such as cowness or potness – a collection of different parts will not suffice. That the whole is not reducible to its parts is crucial to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika resistance to the Buddhist reduction of objects to constituents and phases because they explain endurance through space and time in terms of integrated natures that are held together by the relation of inherence (*samavāya*). The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas adduce a number of reasons for their view that prior to origination,

the effect does not exist in its underlying cause. Some of them are:

(a) The effect was not perceived in the causal substrate.
(b) If the pre-existent effect lacks specifiable properties, it is not identifiable and thus its existence does not fall within the province of inference.
(c) The agent's efforts would be superfluous if the effect already existed.
(d) A pile of threads is not called 'cloth' and vice versa.
(e) Difference in function of causes and effects: a lump of clay won't carry water.
(f) Difference in form or shape of causes and effects.
(g) Number: threads are many, the cloth one.

The human condition: bondage to natural causality

We said above that some souls have become entangled in and misidentify themselves with aspects of the material environment, in particular psychological faculties and events, and the body. The process occurs when the mind (the *buddhi*), a material product, captures the reflection of the light of some consciousness. The conscious spirit is then confused with some organic material configuration. We only function as individual conscious agents and experiences when conjoined with a body and psychological apparatus. We engage with the world through the operations of the physical *buddhi*. Immersed in daily life, where our natural drives and the acquisitive mentality encourages us always to be moving on, satisfying our interests and achieving our own purposes, we generate *karma* that necessitates further births in the here and now.

The Sāṃkhya distinction consciousness as the transcendental presupposition of experience and consciousness as a stream of psychological events – cognitions, thoughts, feelings and desires – will become influential. Consciousness is constitutive of sentient beings, but sensory activity, perceptual cognitions and consequent conceptual thoughts that come and go are psychological functions that properly belong to the material mind and sense-faculties. *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* 5 says that perception is a judgement (*adhyavasāya*) about each of the sensory faculties' specific objects. *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* 23 says that judgement is a function of the physical *buddhi*. The *Yuktidīpikā* commentary elaborates: definite awareness is a conceptual apprehension involving a propositional belief such as, 'This is a cow' or 'this is a man'. Primary experience is a function of the sense-faculties that assume the form of external objects. A thought such as, 'This white cow is running' is a judgement based on sensory deliverances.

Primary experience, mere observation or just seeing something, is restricted to the present time, but perceptually based thoughts and judgements can range over past, present and future. Sense-based primary experience is not conceptual. Concepts belong to the *buddhi*, which is able to discover generalities, and is unrestricted where its objects are concerned. But although the mind apprehends the forms of objects once they have been grasped by the senses, being physical it requires illumination by the consciousness that it has borrowed if psychological events are to mean anything. Hence we need to posit the conscious principle as the ultimate source of experiencing. But that principle is merely an observer rather than an active participant in experience. Such is the vision of the world-renouncer. This is of course problematic because if the process by which the souls become enmeshed in physical conditions is a purely mechanical and automatic one, and since *prakṛti* and its works are eternally active, it is hard to see why it should not afflict the released soul again.

Liberation (*kaivalya* – 'wholeness', 'isolation') from the cycle of becoming and rebirth (*saṃsāra*) results from the discriminating insight, presupposing the discipline of *yoga*, that the purely conscious and inactive soul is distinct from both the physical and psychological spheres that are the evolutions of material nature. *Prakṛti* then ceases to function in relation to the enlightened centre of consciousness. Liberation occurs when the three *guṇas* are reabsorbed into *prakṛti*, whose functions cease. The spectator-soul recovers its true form, detached from mental modifications and other features of embodiment. Knowledge is enough to effect the soul's disengagement from the environments of experience.

The Yoga vision

Yoga accepts the Sāṃkhya metaphysic, but the *Yoga* tradition has its own identity. The foundational text is the *Yoga-Sūtra* of Patañjali, variously dated from the second century B.C. to fourth century A.D. The commentary by Vyāsa is probably a work of the sixth century. Vācaspati Miśra (950–1000) wrote a commentary called the *Tattvavaiśaradi*. The *Yogasūtrabhāṣyavivaraṇa* is probably much later.

In Indian culture, any discipline of physical and mental self-cultivation and self-transformation whose aim is that of freeing us from rebirth is called '*yoga*'. The *Yoga-Sutra* defines its subject as the restraint and suppression of all mental

modifications – that is to say, all forms of thought and feeling, whose forms the soul has assumed. The goal is a disengagement from the life of action in which the soul recovers its true nature. This is achieved by constant contemplative practice and detachment, presupposing mental and moral cultivation. Detachment is said to be self-mastery on the part of one who no longer thirsts for perceptible objects or any of the transitory goals promised by the Scriptures. Active *yoga* consists in austerities, the recitation of mantras and the study of scriptures bearing on freedom from rebirth, and the direction of the mind to Īśvara – an exemplary soul (*puruṣa*) who has transcended the mutually dependent factors of *karma* and what are collectively termed 'the afflictions'. The latter are ignorance (a failure to discriminate what matters from what does not, the morally valuable from the corrupt, and what is one's true identity from one's personality and everyday identifications), selfishness, desires, animosity and attachments. The discriminating person has realized that everything is unsatisfactory because pleasures turn into frustrations, because of the weight of dispositions inherited from previous lives over which we have no control, and because our minds are always restless and at war within themselves.

The soul in its pure form is mere non-intentional awareness. When implicated in the conditions of space and time, it has an observer's perspective on of the thoughts and feelings that are functions of the embodied mind with which it is associated.

The eight stages of the physical, moral and mental discipline of classical *Yoga* are:

Self-restraint; non-violence, honesty in thought, word and deed, sexual restraint and lack of greed.
Discipline: interiorization, tranquillity, asceticism, mantra recitation, the study of texts on liberation and attention to God.
Physical postures; exercising control over the psychosomatic complex.
Breath-control: regulation and reduction of the processes of inhalation and exhalation that increase psychophysical control.
Withdrawal of the senses from their objects and direction of attention to the inner self.
Attention: focusing the mind on a single point (i.e. an object of meditation).
Meditation: the uninterrupted continuity of awareness of the object of meditation.
Profound contemplative introversion in which there is no self-awareness.

Mental purification coincides with purification of the soul. The state of liberation from rebirth is one of wholeness and isolation (*kaivalya*) where

consciousness experiences only itself. It occurs when the constituents of material nature no longer operate in relation to the individual centre of consciousness. The soul recovers its true form, disjoined from mental and physical modifications.

Further reading

For the *Sāṃkhya-kārikas* see Larson (1979).

Larson and Bhattacharya (1987) has a useful introduction and summaries of works, including the important *Yuktidīpikā*, which is edited in Wezler and Motegi (1998).

For the *Yoga-Sūtras* and commentaries see Woods (1927) and Whicher (1998).

Chapter 11 of Halbfass (1992) is valuable for Sāṃkhya.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Can we make sense of there basically being more than one centre of pure consciousness?
2. Does it make sense to hold that material nature operates for the sake of the *puruṣas*?
3. Can the *puruṣas* be finally released from rebirth?

8 Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika

Chapter Outline

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is a form of direct realism about an objective mind-independent world of enduring objects, properties and relations that shape our thought. The tradition holds that when we are thinking rationally, reality is fully determinate relative to our concepts and language. It is one of the Brahminical lines of a defence against the Buddhist reduction of objects to temporal phases and their rejection of permanent structuring principles such as universals, kinds and

enduring bearers of experiences. Their metaphysic is what is sometimes called a 'substance-ontology' according to which the world consists of enduring individual entities that are the bearers of universal and specific properties. It is the interactions of these 'basic particulars' that generate processes and events. By contrast, a Buddhist event or process ontology says that what is basic is a system of relations and not individual objects. There, everything is interdependent (*pratītya-samutpāda*) and causality just means that Bs follow As. There are no stable persisting identities (*nairātmya*). Nothing really lasts (*kṣaṇikatva*). No universals run through the whole of reality. Thinking in terms of individual entities is mental construction out of what is in fact a fluid process. It is to such an outlook that Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is opposed. For them, reality is an intelligible framework of stable structures and persisting individual entities. For centuries Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers formulated metaphysics and epistemologies that were designed as bulwarks against the anti-substantialist Buddhist outlook.

Nyāya direct realism says that cognitions are informational states that depend upon and disclose objects in the world (*artha-prakāśa-buddhi*). It is a form of externalism – the view that mental events are necessarily, and not just causally, dependent upon external objects. Our thoughts and representations are not a veil intervening between cognizing subjects and the world. We are always and already 'outside ourselves' with the entities that we encounter and which belong to a world already discovered and invested with meaning. The world is as it appears to commonsense: stable objects in a three-dimensional spatial framework. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas believe that their system of categories captures the structure of reality as it is in itself. They accept a correspondence theory of truth according to which there is a structural isomorphism between true thoughts and states of affairs that obtain. Genuine universals (*jāti, sāmānya*), qualities (*guṇa*) and relations determine the phenomenal, causal and logical organization of the world of individual substances (*dravya*). They fix the actual states of affairs that obtain as the world. Real properties that qualify objects, and real relations (*samavāya* and *saṃyoga*) play a basic role in the objective, non-arbitrary classification of objects.

Actually there are two traditions here, but they were never far apart. Nyāya was originally concerned with epistemology and valid reasoning. It describes itself as an investigation of matters established by means of knowing, including inference that is based on perception and testimony. Vaiśeṣika was originally more concerned with metaphysical questions about the basic constitution of the cosmos and established the system of categories that we shall shortly

describe. By the time of Udayana (c. 1050–1100 A.D.) they had coalesced and what follows is a synthetic overview of some of their concepts and categories. Any attempt to delineate our world-view in a categorial scheme will run into problems. Inconsistencies are bound to arise. The Navya-Nyāya thinkers, the most influential of whom are Gangeśa and Raghunātha, attempt resolutions of some of the problems and introduce clarifications and innovations. Their writings are very difficult and I have not attempted to say much here.

Some people and their works:

Nyāya

Gautama Akṣapāda (c. 150 A.D.), the author of the fundamental *Nyāya-Sūtra*.

Vātsyāyana (350–400 A.D.) author of the *Nyāya-Bhāṣya* on the *Nyāya-Sūtra*.

Uddyotakara (550–600 A.D.) author of the *Nyāyavārttika*.

Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (850–900 A.D.) author of the *Nyāyamañjarī*.

Vācaspati Miśra (A.D. 950–1000) author of the *Nyāyavārttika-tātparyaṭīkā*.

Bhāsarvajña (900–950 A.D.) author of the *Nyāyasāra* and *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*.

Udayana (c. 1050–1100 A.D.) author of the *Lakṣaṇāvalī, Ātmatattvaviveka, Nyāyakusumañjali* and *Kiraṇāvalī*.

Gaṅgeśa (c. 1300 A.D.), author of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi*.

Raghunātha (1475–1550 A.D.), author of the *Padārthatattvanirūpaṇa* and *Dīdhiti* on the TattvacintāmaṇI.

Vaiśeṣika

Kaṇāda, *Vaiśeṣika-sūtras* (first century A.D.?)

Praśastapāda (c. 500 A.D.), author of the *Padārthadharmasaṃgraha*.

Śrīdhara (fl.991 A.D.), author of the *Nyāyakandali* on the preceding.

Early Nyāya says that we reach the Highest Good by understanding the truth about the reliable methods of knowing (*pramāṇa*), the knowable objects (*prameya*) and the various forms of argument and debate. In other words, the truth (*pramā*) will set us free. Freedom here results from the elimination of misconceptions, activities, rebirth and suffering.

We will begin by looking at the knowable objects and their organization in a system of categories (*padārtha*) and then move on to a consideration of the methods of knowing.

Metaphysics: the system of categories (*padārtha*)

Anything falling under one of the categories is existent, and in principle knowable and nameable.

The categories are:

Dravya – Substances or enduring objects
Guṇa – Qualities
Karma – Actions/Motions/Movements

The above three are all categories of particulars that fall under the universal properties inhering them.

Sāmānya – General properties encompassing both real universal properties and kinds (*jāti*), as well as certain imposed or imputed properties (*upādhi*). Only *jātis* are genuinely real *padārthas*. By contrast, imputed properties or *upādhis* are just concepts.
Viśeṣa – Unique Particularities
Samavāya – The relation of inherence
Abhāva – Absences

Substances: the category *dravya*

Substance is defined as that which lacks the constant absence of qualities and motions. Some substances are simple (e.g. souls) while others are *integrated* wholes, consisting of parts. Each is a manifestation (*vyakti*) of a genuine universal property. They occur as natural or artificial kinds. Some are products and thus perishable, while others are eternal. At the first moment of its existence, a substance has no qualities or actions. But it has a universal property. An individual cow is nothing unless it is an instance of the generic property 'cowness'.

Earth, water air and fire are basic substances. Combinations of their atoms in varying proportions constitute non-permanent physical entities. Atoms are uncreated, indivisible and indestructible. If there was infinite divisibility a mountain would have the same size as a mustard seed! The cosmos comes about when the godhead imposes repeatable structures upon these raw materials.

The atmosphere is a substance. It occurs everywhere. It is the medium through which sounds are transmitted. It is single and thus does not manifest a genuine universal property.

Time and space are substances. In themselves they are single, eternal and omnipresent. Space explains the structuring of our experience in terms of right and left, up and down, east and west and distance and proximity. Such experiences are grounded in stable objective structures independent of our minds. Although time is single, we interpret it in terms of conditions (*upādhi*) such as past, present and future, earlier and later and its passing slowly or quickly. But these concepts do not really affect it.

Where these systems are concerned the word '*Ātman*' might be best translated as 'principle of identity' but I shall use 'self' for short. It is a type of substance that is the ultimate subject of cognitions, emotions, desires and efforts, as well as the bearer of good and bad *karma*. The inclusion of selves in the category of substances indicates that the concept was a naturalistic one, radically different from the reflexive centres of awareness proposed by the *Vedāntins*, the *Sāṃkhyas* and the *Śaivas*. Selves are eternal, everywhere and essentially distinct from each other, but each is embodied differently and has a series of life-histories through time. Selves are not essentially conscious, although consciousness is their distinctive property. Cognitions, as well as desires, feelings, intentions and personal characteristics are contingent properties that occur only when a self is localized in an objective environment. Selves are non-physical and non-conscious principles of identity that must be posited to explain our abilities to remember and to synthesize the present variety of experiences into a unity. A life is a series of embodied experiences, but something supra-experiential is required to impart unity and coherence to the stream, indeed to constitute the manifold of experiences as one stream. That something is the principle of identity.

The existence of such a principle of identity is established by inference. Not being of the nature of consciousness, it cannot reveal itself and cannot be known by introspection. The subject is not manifest in conscious acts, which are entirely intentional or attentive to objects outside the mind. An argument for the existence of the enduring self is that thoughts, desires and acts of will are qualities and cannot stand alone: there must be a continuous subject to which they belong. It is also argued that the pronoun 'I' must stand for something. It cannot be the body, because use of the expression 'my body' indicates that it belongs to something else.

There are other arguments for the existence of an enduring principle of identity in the face of the Buddhist reduction of personal identity to a causally connected stream of embodied experiences. There are a number of the background assumptions to be borne in mind. What one remembers depends on what one perceived or learned earlier. One does not remember the experiences of other people. The Brahmins insist that personal identity must be a further fact over and above a stream of connected experiences. It is that which underlies the stream of personality or individual character. It is that which both relates experiences occurring at different times and is the precondition of the coherence of the manifold of present experience. For the Nyāya thinkers, this further fact is not essentially conscious. (Neither the Brahminical nor Buddhist traditions think that the identity of a person can be purely physical.)

One argument for persisting identity is that there must be a suitable vehicle for the preservation of memory traces of previous experiences. Something has to hold the stream together. Bundles of perceptions have to be bound by something. There is also the argument from experiential memory – remembering a state of affairs in which one has participated. Sometimes I can recover the sense of what it was like to enjoy a past experience: it is like being there once again. For this to be possible, there has to be some factor that connects present experience and recovered memory, namely the subject to which each belongs. There is also the argument from recognition. I can only recognize the building that houses the Liverpool University Philosophy Department as the same one that I saw yesterday if the subject of yesterday's experience is the same as today's. Also, the capacity to unify perceptions belonging to different sensory faculties requires not just a single object but also a perceiver who integrates them. I can simultaneously see, smell, taste and feel an orange. The experience is given as a unity. But each sensory faculty has a distinct sphere of operation. Some other factor must be unifying the perceptions. That something is the self, in association with the mind (*manas*). There is the argument from the desire to enjoy again something remembered. I see an orange and really want to eat it because I recall its delicious flavour. This complex mental synthesis (*pratisaṃdhāna*) must belong to a single subject who synthesizes diverse experiential events (present cognition of the object, previous cognition of the object, the recollection of the pleasure it gave, desire to enjoy it again). They cannot synthesize themselves if each is momentary, confined to its own sphere and is thus not cognizant of the others. But if it is allowed that the

mental synthesis holds merely between the cognitions, they would become assimilated to each other and we would no longer have a series of discrete individual factors constituting the stream of experiences. In a case like this we need some further factor that explains unification across sensory faculties, the connection through time between my present sight of the orange and my recognition of the orange as similar to one previously tasted, and the connection between the earlier experience, the present desire and the anticipation of the experience of eating the orange. It is significant that we do not have to connect these experiences with a single subject. The 'I' is given as implicit in them. To turn Hume against himself, 'I can never catch myself at any time without a perception'.

The Buddhist may say that cases of mental synthesis arise in virtue of the cause-effect relation between momentary cognitions in a single series and so there is no need to posit a single cognizer. The response is that even if there can be a cause-effect relation between different momentary mental events, this would not explain the phenomenon of memory. For a mental event to be experienced *as a memory*, there has to be an enduring subject. A prior experience of pleasure in a stream would be precisely that. It would not be remembered from the present perspective as *what had been* a pleasant experience. Just as one person does not remember what was experienced by another, so one discrete cognition cannot *remember* the content of another.

The Buddhist attempt to explain all of the above phenomena in terms of a stream of experiences impersonally related as cause and effect is not really satisfactory. There has to be something that holds the stream together, something that, as it were, underpins the causality. It is not clear that the Buddhist account can explain synthetic experiences (*pratisaṃdhāna*) if they understand one mental event in a series as the cause of the next only in the sense that one precedes the other. But such a relationship can occur between events occurring in different series. Something stronger than causality is required – namely, the mental events are all related to something else.

There has to be something in relation to which an experience is identified as past, another present and another anticipated as future. Something has to unify the manifold of current experiences. Experience flows: we are always aware of it changing through time. But change is only possible if there is some stable factor that undergoes it. The Buddhist is actually talking about successive replacements rather than change. An enduring principle of identity, the subject of experiences, is the most economical explanation of the phenomena.

The reductionist theory that psychological continuity is nothing but a basically impersonal continuum of causes and effects has a persistent allure, despite its physicalist and functionalist animus. But there are some considerations that should make us think twice about the explanatory sufficiency of causality here. It is uncontroversial that causal relations sometimes hold between experiences. I burn my hand on a hot pan lid, cry out and my wife is alarmed (perhaps . . .). But the experiences here do not belong to a single person. It may perhaps be the case that a causal account can be given of the formation of personality or character when this is regarded as in some sense an achievement. But a problem is that a lot of fragmentation or disintegration of experiences over time is consistent with their still being a single person. (Less dramatically, as the reader knows, my mind flits from one thing to another quite at random.) As Bishop Butler said to Locke, a person is more than what they remember. It might be possible to give an objectifying purely causal description of the psychological processes of an animal that is not a person – one that cannot use the pronoun 'I'. In the case of a personal individual stream of experiences, it is plausible to say that sometimes a present experience (causally) elicits a memory. But the reductionist account says that the relations between experiences within a single stream ('series person') are all causal ones. This is questionable. It is not clear that in every case of experience B following experience A, the relation is causal. But the basic being of the subject (that which is meant by *ātman*) is a *given*. It is not a product or an achievement. This basic subject is expressed in first personal 'I-thoughts' and the relevant connections here are not causal ones. The first-personal, autobiographical continuity of human persons is not given in causal terms. If I think, 'I was born in Heswall' and 'I now live in Liverpool', I can truly conclude, 'I was born in Heswall and now live in Liverpool'. That conclusion has nothing to do with causation, but is a matter of inferential entailment. The inference is valid because the two features are states of the same person. So it is not obvious that the unity of a person's mental life is to be explained in causal terms. Causal connections between experiences are insufficient to constitute or produce a continuum. The connections hold because of the character of the relation between thoughts, and that relation derives from their being states of the same person. The reductionist view is that personal identity is an illusion that is constructed out of experiences. We then mistakenly invest this illusory identity with an enduring character. The basic objection is this: how can construction, mistaken or otherwise, happen if there is nothing capable of doing the constructing in the first place?

Because having experiences is an accidental product of being embodied in some environment, the released state is one of unconsciousness. Unappetizing as this sounds, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers observe that at least you can't want anything, and that there is no such thing as pure happiness since happiness is always pervaded by fear of its loss. Later writers, perhaps under the influence of forms of Vedānta, mollify the position and say that the released state is, somehow or other, blissful.

Mind (*manas*) is a faculty that is instrumental in our having sensorily-derived thoughts, feelings, desires and intentions. Each embodied soul, the vehicle of experiential continuity, is contingently connected with a mind. The sensory receptors transmit a range of information about the objective environment to the *manas* which operates as a central processor co-ordinating that information and selecting what is relevant to the present state of the organism. Since the operation of each of the senses is restricted to its own proper sphere, another factor is required to explain the co-ordination of sensory experience, so that we can simultaneously touch what we see.

The *manas* is instrumental in the conversion of some stimuli into feelings, the translation of some items of cognitive input into conscious thoughts with practical applications (storing some as memories), and the transformation of some affective responses into acts of will. Thoughts, feelings and intentions thus become temporary properties attaching to the permanent soul-principle and a centre of knowing, agency and experience is created.

The category *Guṇa* (quality)

These are characteristics belonging only to substances or enduring objects. Substances can undergo changes respect of their qualities and still remain the same. The loss or gain of an integral part, however, results in a new substance.

Some are sensible properties: colours, tastes, smells, touch, sounds (each exclusively related to the appropriate sense-organ). Other natural features include: dimension, temporal and spatial relations of proximity and remoteness, weight, fluidity, numbers, as well as the relations conjunction and its counterpart disjunction. Others are non-physical properties specific to embodied selves: cognitions, pleasures, pains, desires, antipathies, conscious efforts, spiritual merit and demerit and inherited character traits.

Guṇas are unrepeatable particular occurrences. The blue specific to my shirt is a different instance from the blue specific to my pen, although

the two shades may be identical. Redness is not a quality but the universal (*jāti*) common to all instances of red. Since a colour pervades the whole substance in which it inheres, seeing an object's colour implies seeing the entire object.

Numbers are properties only of substances. But every entity has the number-quality 'one', which is treated as a special case. In each pair of objects there is the specific quality of *two ness*, although neither is double. (Duality is a universal inhering in each case of *two ness.*) All larger numbers relate to collections of objects in a special way by a relation called 'encompassing' (*paryāpti*). They are trying to do justice to everyday expressions like, 'the number of trees in the forest'. Whatever the number is, it does not apply to each of the trees individually. They did not consider the possibility that numbers apply to concepts.

If qualities only belong to substances and numbers are qualities, there cannot be a number of numbers or of any other quality. Nor can we consistently say that universals are one. In response to this, the Navya-Nyāya thinker Raghunātha says that numbers belong to a separate category of their own. Indeed Bhāsarvajña had said that numbers are not qualities, but relations of identity and difference. What this means is that when we say that a *jāti* is one or that the atmosphere is one, we are not attributing a property. Indeed, the only attributive use of one is to say that something is integrated or that it is identical with itself. When we say that a *jāti* is one what is meant is that it is unanalysable.

Conjunction (*saṃyoga*) is a temporary relation of contact between two separate objects.

Cognitions (*buddhi, jñāna, upalabdhi*) illuminate objects, external to minds. They are functional psychological properties, playing a role in interpersonal communications. The inclusion of cognition in the categorial schema is a feature of the naturalistic worldview, which denies that consciousness is absolutely fundamental. Cognitions or informational states are particular episodes targeted on the particular objects or states of affairs that cause them. As well as current engagement with the environment (*anubhava*), there is memory or the retention of information that is produced from stored traces of prior cognitions of objects and is elicited by present ones. Their realism is what is sometimes called 'externalist' in that they say that the occurrence of a cognitive episode is necessarily and not just causally dependent upon the subject's being placed in an objective environment. They recognize that there are many psychological episodes that pass unnoticed. Sometimes we are on 'automatic pilot'.

That is to say, information may be received from the environment via the senses, processed by the mind (*manas*) and stored in the memory without being consciously registered. The introspective elevation to explicit awareness of an item of informational input is termed *anuvyavasāya*. This happens when one cognitive state becomes 'telescoped' by another. They do not accept that cognitions about the environment are intrinsically reflexive or self-illuminating. An objection to this is that if the elevation to consciousness of an informational state requires another psychological state, an infinite regress results.

A cognitive episode qualifies as a piece of knowledge rather than an informational state or mere true belief when it is produced by one of the reliable methods of knowing (*pramāṇa*). Present experience (*anubhava*) may be true or misleading. Perceptual knowledge is direct contact with an object or state of affairs. A true cognition is one in which the attribute that is possessed by the external object is a feature of the content of the cognition. A false awareness is a situation which the actually present external object does not have the attribute that is a feature of the content of cognition, as when we think, 'This is silver' in relation to a piece of shell. The awareness refers to real silver existing elsewhere and not to a mental entity such as an hallucination or to a 'mere appearance'. Falsehood is exposed in practical failure. The tradition develops a sophisticated form of a direct realist epistemology holding that there is a structural isomorphism between the complex content of a true cognition and an objective state of affairs.

The category *Karman* (motion)

Acts characterize substances and are always transient. They include the varieties of motion, contraction and expansion. They cause conjunctions and disjunctions.

The category general property (*Sāmānya*)

This category includes objectively real universal properties (*jāti* – literally 'kind') that exist independently of their instances. There are also 'imposed' or 'imputed' properties, termed '*upādhi*, and these are understood as used arbitrarily to group a plurality. They are just concepts. Genuine universal properties (*jāti*) are manifest in what we would call natural and artificial

kinds. 'Cowness', 'horseness' and 'being a Brahmin' are examples of the former. 'Potness' is an example of the latter – individual pots manifest a permanent and stable underlying structure. *Jātis* are manifested in their particular substances, qualities and motions but they exist eternally and independently of their instances, which come into being, change and last for a while. *Jātis* exist objectively, independently of human thinking. They feature in our modes of thought but they are not thereby created. They are discovered not invented. They are unitary and unanalysable (*eka*), eternal and permanent (*nitya*) and occur in many manifestations (*aneka-vṛtti*). They occur in substances, qualities and motions by the relation of inherence (*samavāya*) but nothing inheres in them. A genuine universal is the unitary property shared by all members of a kind or class. The world consists of objects belonging to kinds. It is not a collection of unique individuals. To identify an object, we mention what *kind of thing* it is. (It is perhaps worth mentioning the view that there are objects belonging to kinds and falling under concepts but there are no *things*. There is no answer to the question, 'how many things are there in this room?' as opposed to the question, 'how many tables and chairs are there?')

We explicitly *recognize* a real general property when we have seen a number of objects belonging to the same kind. But even though we may have seen only one elephant, we have still *perceived* the property 'being an elephant' even though we do not yet know that the individual belongs to a natural kind. This is a form of extra-ordinary intuition (*alaukika-pratyakṣa*) that relates to real universals (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*). According to this theory, universals are not innate ideas. Universals are not ideas abstracted from sensory impressions. Nor are they general concepts formed by a process of induction. Universals are objective realities, part of the furniture of the world that are discovered by non-sensory intuition.

A universal is said to *pervade* the particulars in which it inheres. It produces a concept of its own nature in respect to one or more objects. When we have an inclusive cognition of a group of objects, some of which may be remembered, it is the universal that causes the recurrent cognition.

Udayana says that universals regulate causality. Causal regularities hold because causal relations obtain not merely between particulars (the Buddhist view) but between particulars in so far as they belong to kinds. Kinds are self-reproducing – dogs give birth to puppies and acorns produce oak trees. Also, the regulative causality intrinsic to kinds imposes limits on the changes that entities undergo. I can become heavier or more short-sighted, but I cannot become a lion without ceasing to exist.

Universals explain our use of general terms, of which they furnish the stable grounds for the repeated applications. The meanings of words are complex: a word such as 'cow' signifies the concept cowness, it produces an image of the form typical of cows, and it can denote an individual cow. Universals explain why we understand entities as belonging to kinds. We can only identify an entity as being similar to another entity if there is some objective basis for that similarity. If everything were utterly unique, we could not relate the contents of our cognitions to each other. It is an illusion to suppose that we could re-identify anything if particulars did not manifest shared features. Re-identification of a particular as belonging to a kind to which others also belong presupposes that kinds are given and not merely conceptually fabricated in accordance with human interests. The success of most of our activities shows that the concepts and categories included in the *padārtha* scheme are not more or less arbitrary inventions. There have to be universal principles running through reality. It is not enough to say that we recognize similarity of the basis of clusters of similar observable features. Particulars differ and observable features are promiscuously distributed. An albino tiger is still a tiger. Something else that combines the clustered features must be posited and that extra factor is the unitary universal. Many universals are manifested in concrete shapes (*ākṛti)* that are specific and regular arrangements of parts characteristic of a kind. When we see an individual cow that is a manifestation (*vyakti*) of the universal cowness we also see the universal by virtue of the shape. The perceptible shape cannot be identical with the universal because it is a collection of features that are integrated by the universal.

Not every characteristic that we understand as common to a group of individuals is a genuine universal (*jāti*). We can divide the world up in all sorts of ways, generating as many properties as suit us. We can speak of 'the community of cooks', but 'being a cook' is not a *jāti* but an imputed property (*upādhi*). 'Being able to swim' is an ability possessed by some in varying degrees so it cannot be a unitary single property. Another example is 'being a beast', which covers many different animals. This is a compound imputed property that is a synthesis of a number of features in this case being hairy, having a tail and having four legs. It is artificial in that it cuts across natural kinds and violates the natural order of classification.

The genuine properties are objective and natural. They are intrinsic features of the instances where they occur. They carve nature at the joints. They are discovered, neither manufactured nor invented nor conceptually constructed. The classes of their instances are not miscellanies. Some of our

concepts, such as 'horse' and 'blue' coincide with the genuine properties and qualities immanent in the cosmos and regulative of its actual conditions. But the imputed properties are just useful concepts.

Udayana formulated six impediments that prevented an *upādhi* from being a *jāti*:

1) Unity: There is only one atmosphere, so 'atmosphericity' does not occur in many.
   'Devadatta-ness' (if attributed to the individual man called Devadatta) is also a simple imposed property.
2) Different names and concepts may signify the same things or properties, but they do not thereby generate different objective realities. There are at least two words that mean 'pot' but they do not signify different kinds of pots. Triangularity and trilaterality do not name two distinct universals. No two universals can inhere in the same things.
3) No two universals partially overlap with each other in their instances. There can be no 'cross-cutting'. This rules out 'beastness'.
4) No universal generates an infinite regress. Universals do not inhere in universals. In other words, there is no cowness-ness inhering in cowness.
5) No universal can destroy the nature of that in which it inheres. Although there is an infinite number of unique particularities (*viśeṣa*) individuating atoms, souls and minds, there cannot be a real universal '*viśeṣa-ness*' because the categories *jāti* and *viśeṣa* are mutually exclusive.
6) A universal must be capable of inhering in its instances. Every universal occurs in its instances by the relation of inherence. There cannot be a universal 'inherence-ness' common to all these relations. Inherence cannot be related to itself by the relation that it itself is.

The category *Viśeṣa* (ultimate particularity)

These are unique features of the simple eternal substances (atoms, atmosphere, time, space, souls and minds) distinguishing them from each other. Whereas complex entities are differentiated by the different arrangements of their parts, eternal substances are partless. So each must have its own individualizing feature. They account for the unique identities of these kinds of entity. The *viśeṣa* belonging to a soul is what differentiates it from every other soul. So released souls that have neither karma nor bodies remain different.

A problem here led to the ultimate abandonment of the category by Navya-Nyāya. If the viśeṣas are themselves distinguished by other individuators,

there is an infinite regress. If they do not need to be distinguished by other individuators, they are unnecessary for individuation.

Samavāya (the inherence relation)

Nyaya posits a universe consisting of innumerable objects and structuring factors. Enduring substances, qualities, movements and universal properties are all counted as entities. There has to be a sort of relation that can combine such realities into complexes while preserving the differences between types. *Samavāya* is the relation by which types are held together while retaining their own identities. It is the cement of the universe. It integrates the constituents comprising particular objects. It combines two items when one is inseparable from the other in the sense that the breaking of the connection means the destruction of one of the terms. It thus differs from conjunction (*saṃyoga* – which links individual substances), where both terms survive separation.

Inherence obtains between qualities and the substances possessing them, actions and substances to which they belong, real universals and their particular instances, and unique particularities and the permanent substances that they individuate. A complex substance is a whole (*avayavin*) inhering in each of its parts. A cloth cannot continue in existence without the threads, while the threads may exist separately.

Qualities and action inhere in substances. The particular case of the quality blue that is a feature of some lotus needs the lotus for its occurrence. A quality is always a property *of* something. Although *we* never encounter a lotus without some quality or other, at the first moment of its existence, the substance has neither qualities nor actions. Quality presupposes substance but substance does not presuppose quality. Qualities (and actions) only exist in some substance that supports them.

There is a problem about treating inherence as a relation in its own right that was exposed by the Advaita Vedāntin philosopher Śaṃkara in his *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya* 2.2.13. The inherence relation is just as real as the items that it connects. This generates an infinite regress since it seems that further connections are required to tie the relation to its terms. Further, the relation of contact (*saṃyoga*) is a *guṇa*, so it is tied to the substances that it connects by *samavāya*. To avoid this, the tradition holds that inherence relates itself to its terms – it behaves like glue in that it is 'self-linking' (*svarūpa-saṃbandha*).

The Nyāya account of causation says that prior to origination, the effect did not exist in its underlying cause but is a totally new product, different from

the already existent basic elements out of which it is made. They reject the category of potentiality, holding that only what is actual and concrete is real and can cause something else. Causation is not the actualization of what was potential but the generation, through re-arrangement, of new entities out of already existent factors. A cause is defined as a necessary prior condition of an effect. There are three factors in a causal complex: the underlying cause which is always a type of substance – e.g. the threads comprising the cloth; the non-inherent cause which is always a quality or activity – e.g. weaving and colour of the threads; the efficient or instrumental cause (*nimitta*) – e.g. the shuttle and other instruments. The weaver is the agent cause.

The category *Abhāva* (absences)

Silence is the absence of sounds. Silences are real. Some absences are real. The absence of coffee in my cup is a fact. When absence is the absence *of something* it is classified as a reality. That which is absent is technically termed the counterpart (*pratiyogin*) to the absence.

There are four varieties of absence. 'Prior absence' is the non-existence of an entity before its production by the re-arrangement of other factors. Destruction is the dissolution of something that has existed for a period of time. Absolute negation covers logical and physical impossibilities. Mutual absence is another way of expressing difference. It is the denial of identity between two things such as a pot and a cloth.

Epistemology: the *Pramāṇas*

Classical Indian epistemological theory centres on the notion of *pramāṇa* or instrument of knowing. The number of such instruments differs according to the different schools of thought. Here we shall just look at perception, inference or reasoning and testimony as methods of knowing. The seeker after truth wants to be sure that as many of his beliefs as possible are true. But he cannot know this by checking them one by one. Obviously, false beliefs do not admit the error of their ways. The truth-seeker wants to be in a position where his beliefs are justified, that is to say, that they are not merely true by chance. The best way to do this is to ensure that any beliefs that he acquires are produced by a reliable method that generally leads to true beliefs. *Pramāṇas* are such methods.

The Nyāya outlook is basically one of commonsense or direct realism according to which perception is direct acquaintance with an external world. Although cognitive errors and hallucinations sometimes occur, for the most part our perceptions are reliable, and vigilance against specious reasons (*hetu-ābhāsa)* can ensure that inferences based upon them are sound. They say that cognitions are primarily and directly about objects and states of affairs belonging to an objective, mind-independent environment. Cognition, as we saw above, is the illumination or discovery of objects. Cognition is direct in the sense that no veil of representations, and no sense-data, fall between the subject and what is given. The extroverted mind is a centre of interactions with the physical environment. The mental is not a private inner arena isolated from the world.

Their directly realist stance is illustrated by their view that memory is not a means of knowing. This is because it does not reveal an object in the past, but a *representation* of it. If the memory cognition is valid, that is because the original cognition was valid. For the most part, what we see is the world about us and not ideas in our minds. We are not, as it were, watching an internal motion picture that has been constructed out of amorphous data supplied from outside. Rather, perceptual cognition puts us directly in touch with external reality.

A *pramāṇa* is an epistemic capacity (*śakti*) or process that produces *knowledge* rather than merely true beliefs, which may have been arrived at accidentally or by chance. To do so it has to be functioning efficiently in the absence of defects (*doṣa*) that may prevent its proper operation. Etymology may be illuminating here. The word '*pramāṇa*' derives from the root '*mā*', which means measuring and ascertaining. A *pramāṇa* is that by which something is measured. It is an instrument for 'getting the measure' of something – understanding it as it really is in the face of some doubt or query that throws the veracity of a belief into question.

The sorts of defects that can impede the proper operation of the perceptual instrument include environmental factors such as poor lighting, haze or remoteness, physical factors such as short-sight or jaundice which makes things appear yellow, and psychological factors such as inattentiveness, a tendency to jump to conclusions, greed in the case of shell mistaken for silver or timidity in that of the rope seen as a snake. That we can identify such defects and understand why we are sometimes mistaken underpins the basic reliability of the perception as a means of epistemic access to reality.

Nyāya is a philosophy of direct realism according to which perceiving the world is to be directly related to matters that are outside you – seeing things

that already exist prior to their being perceived as they really are. But the fact that cognitive errors and hallucinations occur suggests that this cannot be right. Surely in such cases what we are 'seeing' are sense-data or mental representations ('mere appearances') of reality that happen to be deceptive. Sometimes I look out of the window and think that it is raining. Sometimes I am right and sometimes wrong. *But the experiences are the same.* From the subjective or phenomenological point of view ('how it feels') really seeing a real snake is the same as misperceiving a rope as a snake. Since both true and deceptive experiences feel the same way to the subject (they are phenomenologically or experientially indistinguishable), it appears that veridical experiences too are mediated by mental representations and we are not directly acquainted with the world. This may encourage the sort of idealist position according to which all experience is just a matter of ideas occurring to minds, and that there is no mind-independent physical world.

Nyāya has a response to these lines of thought. They say that we only make mistakes when things are similar in some respects. We never confuse a mountain with a mustard seed. When I see a rope as a snake this is because the rope is similar to the snake in some respects. (Likewise in the case of seeing a piece of mother of pearl as silver.) Under the influence of weaknesses such as timidity and excessive caution, the appearance of the rope elicits memory traces of a snake. The memory trace of the snake triggers the operation of extraordinary perception (*alaukika-pratyakṣa*) that relates the subject directly to some snake that is outside one's field of vision. The appearance in the deceptive case is not an inner mental item, such as a sense-datum or a memory-image, but a real feature of the world. So the deceptive experience relates to something real, even though it is not actually present to the mind and senses. In other words, I am neither experiencing a purely mental representation or 'mere appearance' nor am I merely imagining a snake out of thin air. (Dreams, fictions and hallucinations are analysed as consisting of remnants of previous experiences of realities to which they refer.)

It follows that although the true and deceptive experiences seem the same to the subject, in fact they are different in themselves. This denial of a common psychological process or mechanism shared by true and false perceptions (a version of 'disjunctivism'), despite how things seem to the subject, blocks the fundamental representationalist and idealist objections to the direct realist view because there is no need to invoke appearances or representations intervening between the subject and the world.

We said that a true belief is a piece of knowledge as long as it is produced by a properly functioning instrument. 'Without a means of knowledge, there is

no understanding of objects. Without understanding of objects, there is no successful activity' (Nyaya-Bhashya 1.1.5). It is not a necessary condition for being in a state of knowledge that the subject knows that he knows. Knowledge does not require subjective certainty. Validity is not *dependent* upon confirmation. What is required is that the cognitive state has been arrived at by an appropriate and reliable method. Nyāya philosophers hold that a cognition is true when it corresponds to some reality external to the mind. They recognize that we cannot check the truth of a cognition by stepping outside ourselves and comparing our thoughts with objective reality. Just as false beliefs do not declare their own falsity, so true beliefs do not display their own truth. Something more is required. Introspection (*anuvyavasāya*) may apprehend a primary belief about the world. We can know that belief is veridical if successful activity proceeds from it. So we infer on the basis of confirmatory evidence that a belief is knowledge. When justification is required, we can appeal to successful activity consequent upon a cognition.

Nāgārjuna had raised the problem of how we know that the *pramāṇas* themselves are veridical. Is there not an infinite regress here? Nyāya thinks that the problem is specious. They admit that in principle there is a danger of infinite regress but that in practice the problem never arises. They make the points that we can see things before we know that we have a visual faculty and that we all recognize that a lamp illuminates both other things and itself. They also admit, in the light of the widely recognized principle that something cannot exercise its proper function on itself, that *while* we are subjects of the visual process of seeing an object, that process cannot itself be an object of observation. But that visual process can be scrutinized subsequently and assessed for validity ('Was the light bad? Did I have my glasses on? Did I have my mind on something else?'). There is no contradiction is a means of knowing being the object of another means of knowing.

Circumstances may arise when we want to check that what has been assumed to be a piece of knowledge is indeed that, or when we want to justify a piece of knowledge. In such circumstances, it is usually sufficient to appeal to successful activity consequent upon the use of the *pramāṇas*. This is what is meant by notion that the validity of knowledge is extrinsic (*parataḥ-prāmāṇya*). The crucial point is that justification does not confer the status of knowledge. If we had to justify everything before we could treat it as knowledge, the process would have no end, and there would be no knowledge. It is worth noting that Gaṅgeśa simplifies matters, quite consistently with the tradition, by accepting that the validity of knowledge is intrinsic.

Knowledge by perception (*pratyakṣa*)

To begin with, it is worth observing that according to the Nyāya realist theory, perception is basically a physical process. Cognitions are understood as qualities residing in the soul-substance in the same way as the quality of blue occurs in a jar. Cognitions are products of a perceptual mechanism based on contact between sense-faculties and the external environment.

Nyāya-Sūtra 1.1.4 defines perceptual knowledge as a cognition produced by contact between a sense-faculty and an object that is faithful (*avyabhicāri*), focused (*vyavasāya*) and does not need to be expressed in words (*avyadapeśya*). This definition is elaborated by Vātsyāyana and all subsequent commentators in the Nyāya tradition. According to Annambhaṭṭa's *Tarka-Saṃgraha*, 'perception is the instrumental cause of perceptual knowledge. It is knowledge produced by contact between an object and a sense faculty. It is two-fold: non-conceptual (*nirvikalpaka*) and conceptual (*savikalpaka*). The former is a cognition whose content lacks specific components (*niṣprakāraka*), as when we say, "This is something". The latter includes specific components, as when we say "this man Dittha is a dark-skinned Brahmin" '.

Perception as a means of knowing is direct acquaintance, unmediated by sense-data, with the objective environment. Their directly realist stance is emphasized by the view that memory is not a means of knowing. This is because it does not reveal an object in the past, but a *representation* of it. If the memory cognition is valid, that is because the original cognition was valid. After the middle of the fifth century, all writers respond to the view of the Buddhist Dignāga who says that perception is free from the *imposition* of concepts (*kalpanā*) on the given. Writing from a completely different metaphysical perspective, he thought that it is only perception that relates us to the real world of inexpressible unique momentary particulars. According to this view, perception never involves concepts. Any experience involving concepts and words he classifies as 'thinking' (*anumāna*) rather than perception. Thinking is at one remove from what is immediately given. (The opposite view is articulated by the grammarian and linguistic idealist Bhartṛhari, again from a different metaphysical perspective, for whom our world is the proliferation of meanings deriving from a single absolute meaning. Bhartṛhari says, 'There is no awareness that is not accompanied by language. All cognition appears as permeated by words. If the eternal identity of word and consciousness were to disappear, consciousness would not illuminate anything: because that identity makes reflective awareness possible.')

The Nyāya response to Dignāga is to distinguish two varieties of perception. They maintain that perceptual experience may or may not involve concepts. Non-conceptual perception is termed '*nirvikalpa*' and conceptual perception is termed '*savikalpa*'. The latter is knowledge that comprehends the relation between what is qualified (*viśeṣya*) and its properties (*viśeṣaṇa*) such as name, universal and qualities. This may be understood as the distinction between looking around the room without noticing anything in particular and directing one's attention to some particular feature and thinking 'that is a round table'. Alternatively, we may distinguish between mere seeing and understanding what one sees. Although there are different formulations of the distinction, they all posit a process of two stages. In the first stage ('mere seeing') aspects of the perceptual field are subconsciously registered. They may subsequently feature in the explicit content of conceptual perception, which grasps the relation between a complex qualified subject and its properties. A non-conceptual perception is an informational state that grasps the whole object as 'a something', but the generic features are not understood as shared by others, and the specific features are not grasped as peculiar to it. Although the generic feature is not grasped as such, the Naiyāyikas argue that it must be perceived implicitly: it belongs to the informational content of the state. We can only think that an object belongs to the same kind as others if it has been perceived as belonging to a certain kind in the first place. They think that it is a mistake to suppose that we can see any number of 'bare particulars' and abstract a general form from these indeterminate experiences.

A conceptual perception is a cognition of something that has attributes *as characterized* by those attributes. It involves an explicit manifestation of information that has already been received at the non-conceptual stage. So conceptual thought is not fabrication, but the organization and conceptual interpretation of what has been *discovered* at the non-conceptual stage.

This distinction surely makes sense. It has been argued by those who want to repudiate the 'myth of the given' that genuine understanding involves the capacity to make inferences and that this can only happen if the initial experiential content has propositional and therefore conceptual form. But something is going wrong here, because on this account of perception young children and animals do not perceive anything. They would be confined to their inner worlds of sensation. But they surely have experiences of an environment that has significance for them and are in receipt of information about it, although they do not think about it in words and concepts.

Anumāna: knowledge by reasoning or inference

While perception is an instrument for the acquisition of knowledge about what is present to the mind and senses, inference (*anumāna*) is a means of acquiring knowledge about matters that are beyond the range of direct acquaintance. The outlook is empiricist (although we must remember that sensory experience is not restricted to particulars but includes universal properties and relations): inference depends upon information supplied by perception.

According to Nyāya, inference begins with a doubt, such as whether there is a fire on a remote mountain. The relevant observation is that we can see smoke. In this case, fire is termed the *sādhya* – that which is to be established. The mountain is called the subject (*pakṣa*) and the smoke is called the reason (*hetu*) in the inferential process. We already know that there is no smoke without fire (this invariable association is called *vyāpti*) and are familiar with other instances where they co-occur, such as the kitchen. By way of corroboration, we also know the truth of the contraposed version of the generalization: 'no fire, no smoke' from cases like the lake. This negative example is intended to show that we have investigated the matter thoroughly and have not confused smoke with mist seen rising from a lake early in the morning. We apply knowledge of the general principle to the case in question and can safely conclude that there is indeed fire on the mountain although we do not see the fire.

A demonstrative inference (*prayoga*) used to persuade someone else (*parārtha-anumāna*) would be formulated by the *Nyaya-Vaiśeṣikas* as:

> Statement of the position or uncertainty (*pratijñā*): 'There is fire (*sādhya*) on the mountain (*pakṣa*).'
> Logical reason (*hetu*): Because there is smoke on the mountain.
> General principle (*vyāpti*): 'Wherever there is smoke, there is fire' that is supported by examples (*dṛṣṭānta*) – like a kitchen (*sapakṣa*); unlike a lake (*vipakṣa*).
> Application: 'There is smoke on the mountain', which states that the subject under consideration has the logical reason that is always associated with (pervaded by or included in – *vyāpta*) the property to be proved.
> Conclusion: Therefore, there is fire.

Clearly the notion of invariable concomitance or pervasion (*vyāpti*) is pivotal. Knowledge of pervasion is said to be the instrumental cause of a piece

of knowledge arrived at by the inferential process. **A** is said to pervade **B** when it occurs in all or more the instances where **B** occurs. Fire pervades smoke. Having an agent pervades being a created product. Impermanence pervades being a product. The factor of greater extent is called the pervader (*vyāpaka*) and that of lesser extent the pervaded (*vyāpya*). This means that A invariably accompanies B: smoke is always accompanied by fire and thus serves as a sign, logical reason or proving property (*hetu*) of the presence of fire.

The presence in some cases and its absence in others are the definition of the sign (liṅga) that is appealed to as the reason. In the background there is the challenge from the materialist sceptics who deny the validity of inference because we are not acquainted with all possible circumstances. We cannot know that smoke is *always* accompanied by fire.

There was a range of views about the nature of the statement of pervasion: some thought that it was just a generalization about many observed instances to which no counterexample has been found. If the proposition that there is no smoke without fire were just a generalization based on observations of instances seen so far, we could not be certain that it will hold tomorrow. The developed tradition resists scepticism by saying that nature is regulated in such a way that there is an invariable association (*vyāpti*) between universal properties such as being 'being smoke' and 'being fire' such that whenever 'being smoke' is manifested so is 'being fire'. The instances might be infinite, but the universal is single. On this account, knowledge of the general proposition that there is no smoke without fire is a type of non-sensory intuition of the invariable association between the universal smoke and the universal fire, or of the pervasion of smoke by fire.

Both the Nyāya and the Buddhist logicians devote much energy to discussions of the many varieties of specious reasons (*hetu-ābhāsa*) in arguments. Among the most common are:

Anaikāntika-hetu (inconclusive reason) of which are three varieties:

(a) the reason occurs in cases where what is to be proved is absent (i.e. it occurs in *vipakṣas*).

Example: The village is holy, because it is close to the Ganges. But there are unholy things close to the Ganges (called *sādhāraṇa-hetu*).

(b) Where the logical reason only applies to the subject of the inference (*asādhāraṇa-hetu*). Example: 'Sounds are impermanent, because they are audible.' It is a condition of an inference's validity that we should be able to cite an instance other than the subject of the inference were both the logical reason and the property to be proved always occur together. But this is impossible here because nothing other than sounds have the property of audibility.

(c) Where the subject of the inference is universal. For example 'Everything is nameable, because it is knowable'. The invariable association is, 'Whatever is knowable is nameable'. Distinct from the universal subject, there can be neither a *sapakṣa* nor a *vipakṣa*, showing the invariable association between the logical reason and what is to be proved. Since the inference begins from a question about whether nameability applies to the subject, the invariant association, 'whatever is knowable is nameable' is itself doubtful.

The variety called *Asiddha-hetu* (unestablished reason) occurs when the reason does not occur in the subject under consideration (*svarūpa-asiddhi*); e.g. 'sound is a property, because it is visible' and in cases where the subject of the inference does not exist or when its existence is controversial. Buddhists apply this to what are held by Hindus to be proofs of the existence of the soul and its properties. They say that no soul is perceived apart from experiences, and since it is the sort of thing that ought to be perceptible, its existence cannot be proved.

In a *viruddha-hetu* (contradictory reason) the reason is defective because it never occurs where the property to be proved occurs: i.e. it contradicts what one wants to prove. Examples: 'There is fire on the mountain, because it is icy.' 'Sound is eternal, because it is produced.'

An inferential argument for the existence of God might run, 'The world has an omniscient creator, because it is a complex product; like a pot'. Here the pot example invites the accusation that the reason is contradictory because it leads to the conclusion that the world has a creator of finite intelligence.

There is another classification, shared by Sāṃkhya and Mīmāṃsā, of inferences into three varieties. This is variously interpreted. Inference from cause to effect (*pūrvavat*) is when we infer from the presence of clouds that it will rain. Inference from effect to cause (*śeṣavat*) is when we infer from a swollen river that it has rained. Inference from general observation (*sāmānyatodṛṣṭa*) draws conclusions about the suprasensible. Observation that a heavenly body has changed place implies movement, albeit unseen. If qualities belong to substrata, and cognition is a quality, we can infer that there is some substance, which we call self, to which it belongs.

Śabda: testimony and the transmission of true information

Among the philosophical traditions, Vaiśeṣika and Buddhism admit that we may obtain knowledge from words, but they say that testimony is a form of

inference and not a method of knowing in its own right. Nyāya, and virtually everyone else, treat testimony as an independent *pramāṇa*, largely because of the problems attaching to assimilating it to either perception or inference. At the same time, they are aware that of the things that we know, many are known on the basis of testimony and not perception or inference. They say that testimony is information supplied by someone who knows the truth and wants to tell it. Speech often misleads but it is a method of knowing in so far as the speaker is well-informed and sincere. As well as reliable information about matters belonging to our world, testimony also includes the Scriptures composed by the 'Seers' who originally heard the sound-units comprising the Vedas. Later writers hold that the Scriptures are reliable because a benevolent and omniscient deity is their author.

It is assumed that the normal situation is that what the speaker states when he utters an assertoric sentence and what the hearer understands directly is a piece of verbal knowledge (*śābda-bodha*) about a state of affairs in the world. Let us bear in mind that it is possible to understand a proposition without believing it to be true and that it is possible to assent to a false proposition. So neither understanding not assent is sufficient for knowledge. The Nyāya account of testimony establishes the conditions under which the hearer understands a proposition, assents to it and obtains a piece of knowledge.

One knows a proposition expressed by a sentence (i.e. there is *śābda-bodha*) when:

The hearer acquires a true belief about the world from hearing the sentence.
The speaker knows the truth and is reliable, sincere and competent.
The sentence expressing the proposition has these features:

(i) The words are uttered together or written together (*āsatti*).
(ii) It is grammatically correct (*ākāṅkṣā*). Just saying the word 'a pot' does not really signify anything. We need another word such as 'bring'.
(iii) It is semantically adequate (*yogyatā*). 'He cuts with a knife' makes sense, but 'he cuts with butter', albeit grammatically correct, does not.
(iv) If the sentence is ambiguous, consideration of the speaker's intention (*tātparya*) in the circumstances should solve the problem.

Words and sentences

The *Nyāya* view about individual words is that while each word has its own significative power (śakti), it is only in the context of a sentence that words are

used to really mean anything. In short, sentences, both fact-asserting and action-guiding ones, are the vehicles of communication and understanding. They think that the relation between a word and its literal or primary meaning is created rather than innate. In some cases (e.g. Scriptural words and words in common usage like 'cow') the word-meaning relation has been decreed by God. The rationale is that we have no knowledge of any original human stipulation that 'pot' should stand for pots. In other cases, the relation has been fixed by human convention – this applies especially in the case of proper names and in languages other than Sanskrit.

Words like 'pot' and 'cow' apply to innumerable individuals that share some property. If the word pot just stood for an individual, the word-object relation would have to be miraculously renewed every time someone mentioned a pot. Communication would break down. But if the word just expressed a common property, when someone said 'bring the cow' he would absurdly be saying 'bring the universal cowness'. So they argue that words like 'pot' and 'cow' have a complex signification. They express a universal feature common to a kind (*jāti*), a perceptible shape (*ākṛti*) and an individual (*vyakti*). A perceptible shape, a configuration of parts, indicates the kind of which the individual is a manifestation. In the case of a model or toy cow, it suffices for the application of the word. While most forms indicate some *jāti*, not every *jāti* is indicated by a form. For example, clay and gold have no specific configuration. They are indicated respectively by their characteristic smell and colour. The variability of forms led the Navya-Nyāya philosophers to deny that shape (*ākṛti*) is an ingredient in the meaning of words. Finally, since here is no real universal 'cookness', the general term 'cook' applies on the basis of participation in the action of cooking. The signification here is just a matter of human agreement, as in the case of proper names.

Further reading

An enjoyable starting-point is Jayanta's play, *Much Ado about Religion* (Dezső, 2005) Act Three of which sees a confrontation between Nyāya and Buddhist ideas.

Another way into the original material is Annambhaṭṭa's *Tarka-saṃgraha* (Athalye 2003).

The *Nyāya-Sūtras* and the commentaries by Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara are translated in Jha (1984).

There are summaries of works and a helpful introduction in Karl Potter (1977), which deals with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika up to Gaṅgeśa, and in Potter and Bhattacharya (1993) for the later period.

Bimal Matilal, *Perception*, treats extensively of Nyāya debates with the Buddhists. Despite the title, its scope is wider than epistemology.

Chapters VI–XII of Matilal (2002) discuss the Nyāya realism in the light of some contemporary philosophical interests.

Jonardon Ganeri, *Indian Logic*, is a useful collection. The same author's *Semantic Powers* concerns Navya-Nyāya philosophy of language, but says illuminating things about the earlier tradition. Ingalls (1951) is a lucid guide to key Navya-Nyāya concepts.

Kishor Chakrabarti (1999), *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind*, also deals with questions about the self and the existence of God.

Scharf, *Denotation* (1996) has a section on Nyāya theories about linguistic meaning and reference and translates *Nyāya-Sūtra*, 2.2.58–69.

Halbfass, *On Being and What There Is* (1992) and Tachikawa, *The Structure of the World* (1981) focus on Vaiśeṣika.

The best, if not the only, work on the materialist tradition is Franco (1994), *Perception, Knowledge and Disbelief*.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Is the Nyāya concept of self a physicalist one?
2. Are their arguments for selves as persisting principle of identity refute the Buddhist point of view. Are the traditions talking about the same thing?

9 The Mīmāṃsā Vision

Chapter Outline

Mīmāṃsā (called *Pūrva Mīmāṃsā* when it is subordinated to its cousin *Vedānta* or *Uttara-Mīmāṃsā*, the Higher Inquiry) is one of the six visions (*darśana*) of classical Indian philosophy. Its practitioners are specialists in the exegesis of the Vedas as the sole authority for the ritual and social duties of twice-born caste Hindus. It includes philosophical reflection upon matters connected with the performance of rituals that are part and parcel of everyday life for orthodox (*smārta*) Hindus. In opposition to Buddhism, *Mīmāṃsā* thinkers articulate a view of the world as sustained and organized by rituals that are performed by persisting human agents who may enjoy their fruits in the future and in subsequent lives, and ultimately secure release from the series of births. A world safe for ritual expectations is one in which there are stable subjects of experience and an objective realm structured in such a way that it behaves predictably.

Here the most important figures are Śabara (probably second half of the fifth century A.D.), who wrote the earliest extant commentary on the *Jaimini* or *Mīmāṃsā-sūtras,* which is the foundational text of the system; Kumārila (600–660 A.D.) whose *Ślokavārttika* is an explanation of Śabara's work; and Prabhākara (c. 650 A.D.) whose works include the *Bṛhatī*.

The central concept here is that of *dharma*, which comprises the notions of natural law, right order and social and religious duty. *Dharma* is revealed by the authorless, eternal and infallible Vedas. We act in accordance with *dharma* when we obey the Vedic injunctions. What is to be done is dictated by scripture, not determined by human intellect and will. Such a mode of living relates us to the highest good.

It is the *dharma* of grass to grow and of the sun to shine. It is the *dharma* of members of the *Brahmin* caste to study and teach the Veda and the *dharma* of *Vaiśyas* to engage in agriculture or commerce. *Dharma* would be unknown were it not taught by the Vedas, which are explicated in texts called the *Dharma-Śāstras*. As an ethical outlook, the concept of *dharma* is thoroughly deontological. Consequentialist standards such as welfare, pleasure and pain, the biddings of conscience, divine command or the cultivation of virtuous character are all irrelevant to the determination of what is right and wrong. Values are exclusively defined by Vedic injunctions and prohibitions, and are manifested in the 'conduct of the virtuous' that derives from strict observance of the Vedic rules separating the pure from the pollutant. *Dharma* is not a 'universal' ethic in that its demands vary according to one's caste and stage of life. One and the same type of action might be right for one person (*sva-dharma* = 'own *dharma*') and wrong for another. There was a widespread recognition of the principle that it is better to perform one's own *dharma* badly than that of another well.

It appears that originally the observance of *dharma* meant the performance and patronage of elaborate and expensive sacrificial rituals generating prosperity (*bhoga*) and temporary enjoyments in paradise (*svarga*). Its neglect has all sorts of negative consequences ranging from personal misfortunes to the collapse of the universe into chaos.

For the later *Mīmāṃsaka* theorists of ritual and social duty, the correct performance of both the public sacrificial rituals by Brahmin priests and the domestic rituals by householders of the highest three castes, in addition to observance of the obligations appropriate to one's caste and stage of life (*varṇa-āśrama-dharma*) controls, maintains and perpetuates order and stability in the universe. A properly performed rite automatically produces its result. It does not depend upon any divine action. The gods exist only in name, that is to say, only in so far as their names are mentioned in the course of rituals. There is no belief in an absolute divinity unsurpassably great being. In that sense, the Mīmāṃsakas are atheists.

Mīmāṃsā is primarily the hermeneutics and defence of those parts of the Vedas that prescribe the performance of rituals and describe their results. The primary concern is the correct performance of the rituals, including the question of who is entitled to perform them and reap their benefits. *Mīmāṃsakas* are also concerned with questions about how language operates, whether it is primarily referential and fact-asserting, or primarily action-guiding, the nature and relationship of words and sentences and whether words primarily signify individuals or express universal concepts. They debate with the Buddhists over the question of the eternity of the phonemes (*varṇa*) comprising the Vedas. They are also concerned with the question of what must be true of the nature of individual sacrificial performers if they are to receive the benefits of the rituals in the future.

Infallible Scripture (*śruti*) is classified in three ways:

Vidhi or *Codanā*: passages commanding the performance of specific rites with specific results. Such injunctive statements are imperative in form (from the technical point of view of Sanskrit grammar their verbs are in the optative mood). They maintain that language is properly meaningful only when it is injunctive or prescriptive – when it tells us to do something and how do go about it – and not when it is descriptive or fact-asserting. The argument for this is that children learn language by observing its application in various contexts of activities. The primary function of language is to produce some action – something to be done (*kārya*) or brought into existence. The ritualists draw the conclusion that those scriptural passages that appear to speak of already established realities must be construed as merely supplementary to the all-important passages enjoining ritual activity.

Arthavāda: Indicative statements describing the manner of performance of rituals and providing explanations. As we have just seen, these are subordinate to injunctions and not independently significant.

Mantras: Incantations invoking the presence of deities during the rites.

The authority of the Vedas (*Veda-prāmāṇyam*)

The Vedas are authorities that instruct us in matters – things to be done – that are outside the scope of other means of knowing such as perception and

inference, and about which we would otherwise remain in ignorance. *Dharma* is not something that we ourselves could know by means of our natural capacities. Since it is something to be brought about, it is outside the scope of perception and those means of knowing that are founded upon perception. A perception is a cognition that is produced when the human sense-faculties are connected with an already existing object. It cannot be the grounds of knowledge of *dharma* since it only apprehends presently existing things. Only prescriptive Vedic language has the capacity to inform us about *dharma* as something that needs to be done.

Any religion that claims to know about the supernatural is going to need a source of authority that is not of this world. For Christians it is the revealed Word of God: both Jesus and the scriptural testimonies to him. *Naiyāyikas*, *Śaivas* and Buddhists hold that scriptures are authoritative when they have a promulgator (in the case of the first two it is *Śiva*) possessed of appropriate virtues. For the Buddhists, the Buddha is himself a *pramāṇa* – a teacher of truth. His authority is indicated by the original and unprecedented character of his salvific message when he tells us about what is to be sought after and what avoided and the means of so doing. He teaches things that we could not know otherwise, as the Veda is held to do. Because he is a reliable guide (*avisaṃvādaka*) in matters to do with human life, he can be presumed to be an authority for non-empirical matters too.

For both Mīmāṃsakas and their Vedāntin cousins, the Vedas are authorities about what lies beyond the bounds of sense because they have no author, either human or divine. They are called '*apauruṣeya*', which literally means non-personal. The Vedas are simply given, not created. The notion of the uncreated, non-personal nature of the meaningful sound-units of the Vedas is foundational for the authority of those scriptures.

The validity of the Vedas is intrinsic to them (*svataḥ-prāmānya*). The notion is an epistemological one, and it basically means that the truth of a thought does not depend upon a later thought that verifies or establishes it. Were it to do so, an infinite regress would result and we could never be said to know anything. On this view, reliability does not depend upon verification or confirmation and may safely be taken for granted. Validity just means not being falsified. A statement may be presumed true if nothing falsifies it or makes it suspect.

Error can arise from a lack of distinctness in the objects of cognition, or it may occur because the complexity or subtlety of objects surpasses our capacities for cognitive discrimination. But it may also arise because the

sense-faculties are somehow defective and thus fail to transmit information to the mind. Kumārila specifies the nature of the possible sources of fallibility which include such factors as greed, desire, hostility, pride, intoxication, passion and shame. These are emotional and moral defects of finite beings. It follows that a false speech-report is entirely the fault of the speaker. But the Vedas have no author, so cannot be open to doubts about their reliability on that score. Moreover, because the Vedas speak of what is absolutely imperceptible and non-empirical, there is no possible cognition that could falsify them. Mandates such as, 'The person who desires paradise should perform fire-sacrifices' speak of things that can never be shown to be false.

The defence of the unquestionable authority of the infallible Veda is one reason why the Mīmāṃsakas argue against the existence of an all-knowing and all-powerful divinity, or an omniscient *Buddha*. Kumārila argues that neither perception nor inference can be used to establish an omniscient being. Obviously, such is never observed. It would be difficult to frame a non-question begging inference on a number of grounds, the most blatant of which is that there are no relevant supporting examples that would validate a statement of universal concomitance (*vyāpti*) between a reason and that which is to be established. In addition, the *arthāpatti-pramāṇa* (argument from 'otherwise-inexplicability' – 'fat Devadatta does not eat by day, so he eats by night') would not be applicable because it is not clear that there is anything that requires explanation by the postulation of an omniscient being. An omniscient being cannot be established by scripture because if it were supposed to be the author, the reasoning would be circular and if the author is not himself omniscient, he cannot claim to know that there is an omniscient being.

Words and sentences

The Mīmāṃsā view is that a Sanskrit word (*pada*) is a permanently fixed sequence of timeless unproduced, and imperishable phonemes (*varṇa*), which are manifested in audible sounds. It is the eternal sequence of phonemes that is the conveyor of meaning or signifier (*vācaka*). Words are essentially and not merely by convention, correlated with the extra-linguistic realities (*artha*) that they express and that are their significations (*vācya*). The relation between signifier and signified consists in the innate power (*śakti/sāmarthya*) of a word and its reality is inferred from the fact that words have an informative capacity. Kumārila distinguishes between this power in words and their application (*niyoga*). A proper name such as Devadatta has a permanent meaning ('Given

by a god') and temporary applications to the men who are its bearers. But in the cases of sortal and mass-terms such as 'cow' and 'gold', capacity and application always coincide.

A given word stands for a limitless number of its objects: 'We say, "The single word 'cow' is uttered eight times and not that there are eight words 'cow'"' The word-object connection (*śabda-artha-saṃbandha*) cannot be a human creation. It cannot be established every time we use a particular word. But we have no traditional recollection of anyone originally fixing the references of words.

Each word expresses its own meaning and an uttered combination of word-meanings is understood as a sentence. Sentences are not units of meaning over and above the words comprising them. This is the mainstream view espoused by Śabara and Kumārila and it is called '*abhihita-anvaya*' or 'the connection of meanings that have been expressed'. (There is another view propounded by Kumarila's contemporary Prabhākara that is called '*anvita-abhidhāna*' ('expressing inter-related meanings').) Prabhākara thinks that word meanings are primarily understood when used to prescribe actions and to bring things about rather than as referring to already existent objects. So the fabric of linguistic understanding consists of sentences that include a verbal meaning. Words have meaning only in the context of sentences. All meanings are relative to particular situations. They argue that a child does not learn individual words on their own but learns language through the insertion and removal of words in sentences. She hears, 'bring a cow' and sees someone do that. Then she hears, 'bring a horse'. By the removal and insertion of words in sentences, she learns the meanings of individual words. The theory of 'the expression of inter-related meanings' may also be interpreted as the view that it is only in the context of a sentence that a word has meaning: when we want to know the meaning of a word, we should look at its use in context and not scrutinize it in isolation.

Let us now return now to Kumārila's view that the real relation between a Sanskrit word and its extra-linguistic signification is inseparable and eternal. If the word-meaning relation is to be permanent and unbreakable, words must be primarily expressive of general concepts and the objects falling under them. They do designate particulars when used in sentences in specific circumstances, but this is not their primary signification. The word-meaning relation obtains between a word and a natural or artificial kind (*ākṛti* or *jāti*). Words mean the underlying structures (*ākṛti*) common to natural and artificial kinds of things. The relation is fixed (*niyama*) and natural (*autpattika*). The

permanence of the word-object relation is of course consonant with the notion of the intrinsic validity of the Vedas. If the Vedic words were like names and primarily signified individuals, the word-meaning relation would be continually broken and reconstituted. But the form common to all cows is a structure comprising the essential properties that make something a cow. It is basic to the cosmos and is endlessly manifested as individual (*vyakti*) cows. The *ākṛti* is not just the visible appearance of cows. Cows come in all sorts of shapes, sizes and colours. But each and every one shares the same internal biological structure that we may call 'cowness' or 'bovinity'. It is that to which we refer when we speak of 'The Cow', meaning the species. The generic form of gold (what we would call its atomic number or molecular structure) is likewise common to all artefacts made of gold.

As Kumārila puts it, 'the kind (*jāti*) is called the physical structure (*ākṛti*) because it is that by which the individual (*vyakti*) is formed. The generic property (*sāmānya*) is the basis of a single concept under which individuals fall' [ŚV *Ākṛtivāda* 3]. The form is a generic property of many things. It is not a configuration of parts (*saṃsthāna*) because there is no configuration of parts in the case of actions, qualities and substances like the self. Because a configuration perishes and differs for each individual, if that were the form, it could not be the generic property expressed by a word. The generic property, kind or form is a property constitutive of individuals and it is the object of a simple cognition.

It is the form that is the primary signification of the word 'cow'. That is why it can apply to many. In everyday life and in Vedic usage, it designates an individual in the context of a sentence. Kumārila says that in the case of singular reference several factors are present: the kind (*jāti* construed as *ākṛti*), its individual manifestation (*vyakti*), their relation, the combination of those three, gender and causal rôle in an event (*kāraka*). In the expression 'a white cow', the quality-word (*guṇa-śabda*) 'white' behaves similarly. In isolation it expresses a quality. In context it designates a particular instance that is a part (*aṃśa*) of an individual substance. A verbal root expresses an action-type. In context, a finite verbal form specifies an activity.

Kumārilabhaṭṭa's realism

Kumārila holds that the uncreated and therefore eternal cosmos, structured by universals and populated by individual knowers and agents confronting

a plurality of objects, is independent of human minds. This sort of realism is integral to the ritualists' world-view. People have to be confident that the rituals are valid, that what they are doing matters and has real consequences, and that they can expect to reap their benefits in the future. The objectivity of the world is underwritten by the theory that cognitions are just *acts*, bearing no internal content of their own, belonging to a self who is their agent. As acts, they have an effect on objects, which already exist and are not brought into being by thought. The effect that a cognitive act brings about in objects is the temporary incidental property of being known (*jñātatā*) or made manifest. This gives expression to the distinction, crucial to realism, between objects as they are in themselves and objects as known. One knows that one knows something not by introspection or from the internal luminosity of consciousness, but as the result of a process of reasoning that observes the production of an effect and concludes that it would not have occurred in the absence of cognition. (Technically, this is *arthāpatti*, involving *anyathā-anupapatti* or 'otherwise-inexplicability/impossibility. Of course, the theory here attracts the objection that we are not knowing the world as such, but only the world as modified by cognition.) Also, the fact that a cognition has occurred permits us to infer that there is a self who is its agent.

The perceptual process and our experience of the world

Kumārila maintains that both sensory perception and discursive, conceptual thinking bring us into direct contact with the real external world. Direct realists deny that perceptions are a veil of representations falling between the subject and the given. Rather they disclose the actual structures of reality. Kumārila confronts a range of Buddhist idealist and anti-realist views, all of which maintain that perceptual experience somehow *misrepresents* reality.

There is an extended treatment of questions about perception in the fourth chapter of the *Ślokavārttika*.

The background here is the influential view of the Buddhist nominalist philosopher Dignāga (400–440 A.D.) that sense-perception (*pratyakṣa*) and reasoning (*anumāna*) are concerned with completely different spheres. This appears to involve a radical severance between perceptual experience of the given and its representation in thought. Dignāga defines perception as always

free from conceptualization (*kalpanā*). Perception is non-linguistic experience of unique, ineffable momentary particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*). The particulars are the only genuine realities and they do not fall within the referential capacity of language. Reasoning uses general concepts, which are mental constructs. There are five types of conceptual construction (*kalpanā*): the association of a cluster of particulars that have furnished a perceptual experience with a proper name; the association of a cluster with a universal ('this is a man'); the association of a cluster with a quality or qualities ('this is white'); the association of a cluster with actions ('this is running'), the association of a cluster with something else that has been identified as a substance or individual entity ('this man is wearing glasses'). The meanings of words are the generalities (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*) constructed by conceptual thought. He says that language is born out of conceptual construction and conceptual construction is born out of language. The picture is that as soon as we start expressing what we experience in words and thoughts, we are distanced from the real world of momentary particulars.

Here is part of Kumārila's response to nominalist anti-realism:
[The immediate background is that since inferential thought always involves concepts, it cannot depend upon perception because the deliverances of the senses are non-conceptual.]

Ślokavārttika IV, 111–120

> [111] As for the view that the logical reason (and other elements in an inferential sequence of thought) is not grasped by sensory perception because sensory perception does not involve conceptualising: that view is false because concepts (*vikalpa*) are implicit in that they enable us cognise the object.

The idea is that any perception that is *about* some object (in contradistinction to a sensory impression that is *of* an object in the sense that it is caused by it) must be to some extent informed by conceptual thought. That Kumārila recognizes the non-cognitive character of sensation is apparent from verses 121–122 where he says that the sense-faculties are an instrumental cause of cognition but they are not cognitive.

> [112] In the first place here is cognition (*jñāna*) that is just seeing (*ālocanā*) and it is free from concepts (*nirvikalpaka*). It is produced from the pure entity and is like the cognitions of infants and the mute.
>
> [113] Neither general (*sāmānya*) nor specific features (*viśeṣa*) figure explicitly in the content of awareness, but the individual that is their substrate is grasped.

The next three verses refer to an Advaita-Vedānta view that will appear in the writings of Maṇḍana Miśra (c.700 A.D.) who says that, 'Initially there is non-conceptual perception relating to the bare reality of an entity (*vastu-mātra*). The ensuing conceptual cognitions comprehend its peculiarities' (*Brahma-Siddhi* p. 71.1–2).

> [114] Others say that there is an ultimate universal called 'Substance' or 'Reality' that is the sole object of perception.
>
> [115] On the other hand, particularities (*viśeṣa*) are known by conceptual cognitions (*savikalpa-buddhi*). Some particularities are specific to an individual and others are shared by many.
>
> [116] But perception that arises without taking account of particularities as either shared or specific does not differ whether it arises in relation to a cow or a horse.
>
> [117] That is false because we apprehend a distinct form in the case of each individual entity. It is not the case that no differences are grasped just because we cannot apply a word to the object.
>
> [118] Even in non-conceptual awareness (*nirvikalpaka-bodhe'pi*), there is an implicit apprehension of an entity as having both shared and specific features, although only a simple form is grasped by the cognizer.
>
> [119] The entity is not identified in its uniqueness because it is not distinguished from others. A generic feature is not grasped because we do not notice any similarity with other entities.
>
> [120] A subsequent cognition by which an entity is grasped in terms of its properties such as its universal and its qualities is also considered a form of perception.

The denial by Buddhists such as Dignāga (and Advaita-Vedāntins) that sensory perception is *always* non-conceptual is open to question. The same can be said about the other extreme that perception always involves explicit conceptual content: if that is true it follows that infants and animals lack perceptual experiences. We see the latter view in the thought of the grammarian Bhartṛhari, who says [VP 1.131–2], 'In this world there is no thought that is not associated with language. All cognition appears as pervaded by language. If the eternal linguistic nature of awareness disappeared, consciousness would not illuminate anything because it is that nature which makes identifications possible'.

There is the question of explaining the relationship between sensation and beliefs. Also, concepts are general but sense perception engages with

particulars. There is an argument that concepts and beliefs are abstractions from the data supplied by sensory experience, but this is not really Dignāga's view. He insists on a radical disjunction between perceptual experience and conceptualization because he wants us to realize that the everyday concepts and categories of thought to which we are attached do not mirror reality as it is in itself. Our concepts are at best impositions upon a given reality that is unstructured in the sense that it is unarticulated and amorphous until we organize it conceptually into persisting objects, kinds, properties and relations.

But if perception and thinking are two completely different modes of experience, it is not clear how the raw data of sensation can be translated into conceptual experience and perceptual judgements. If perception justifies (rather than just causes) beliefs, a perceptual experience must yield a reason to hold a given belief. But only an informational state with a least implicit conceptual content can furnish such a reason.

Dignāga's radical divorce of sensory perception and thinking provoked opposition from thinkers belonging to the orthodox Brahminical schools. They maintained that there is a single kind of mental activity called perception and that it puts us in touch with the real world. Perception has two varieties: non-conceptual (*nirvikalpa*) and conceptual (*sa-vikalpa*). As we have just seen, Kumārila is party to this reaction to Dignāga when he says (as we saw above) that a cognition that grasps an entity as a manifestation of a kind (a persisting individual substance that possesses certain qualities and may be capable of certain types of action) is also a form of perception. The point is that the conceptual grasping of such structure is not a conceptual fabrication, imposition or invention but rather represents a discovery. The informational states, which a subject acquires on the basis of primary perception, are non-conceptual. Judgements about the world based upon such states necessarily involve conceptualization. For this to happen information about an object and its properties must have been received and *implicitly* registered in the primary informational state. According to this outlook, conceptualization or judgement or belief takes the subject from an informational state with non-conceptual content to a cognitive state with conceptual content. Although judgements are based upon experience, this does not entail that they are about informational states. They are about the world. When one wants to check that a judgement is accurate, one looks again at the world and not at one's states.

An illustration may help here: I may be looking in the direction of a green expanse, although I might not even be explicitly registering that it is green because my mind is on something else. This is a perceptual informational

state, but one that does not involve any specific thoughts about what is in the field of vision. Its content is non-conceptual. But I may shift the focus of my attention and register that the expanse is green and undulating. On closer inspection, I come to understand that I am seeing a golf course. I am now in an informational state whose content is conceptual. An animal or infant could be seeing the same area, but could not believe that it is a golf course.

The problem with Dignaga's position is that it cannot accommodate the following distinctions:

a) Sensations, or sensory-impressions, are *of* objects in that they are caused by objects but they are not *about* objects. In other words, they are not cognitive.
b) Some perceptual experiences are about objects without being discriminative or involving judgements. They may just be informational states of the subject that do not involve any commitment to beliefs about the object. But such states are cognitive and informed by meaning.
c) Perceptual experiences that are explicitly discriminating ('This is a black lap-top PC'), and epistemic ('I know that there is a book on the desk').

The nature of ritual agents

Kumārila maintains that there is a subject or possessor (*ātman*) of cognitions, (indicated by the pronoun 'I'), which remains constant through all its changing cognitive and affective states. It is an eternal reality, and our intuition of it does not reveal any conditioning by space and time. Contact, mediated by the psychological apparatus, with those conditions is a product of *karma*, which propels the *ātman* through a series of embodied lives in a hierarchy of contexts of experience.

For a ritualist like Kumārila, the primary significance of human individuals consists in their being agents of sacrificial causality. The ideal person is simply obedient to social and religious duty and free from the personal motivations that generate *karma*. It is *karma*, purposive intentional action, that personalizes the *ātman*. But truly disinterested action will not generate *karma*. Accumulated *karma* will be exhausted over the course of lives dedicated to duty for the sake of duty alone. A very long series of lives spent in disinterested conformity to *Dharma*, in a spirit of 'duty for duty's sake' and not for any advantages that it might yield, will terminate in the release from rebirth of a depersonalized, timeless and featureless entity without contacts or cognitions of an environment.

But what about the selves that we are in the here and now? Fundamental to the Mīmāṃsā world-view is the conviction that the person who performs an action is the same as the one who will enjoy its fruits. We would feel no motivation to act if we did not believe that we will experience the consequences. But if the *ātman* is inactive due to its permanence and omnipresence, and if it is not really subject to pleasure and pain, how can it be the enjoyer of the fruits of its actions? And if when it experiences suffering or pleasure it undergoes a real change, how can it be permanent and immutable (*nitya*) because that which is permanent is incapable of any sort of causal activity, either simultaneously or successively? To questions like these Kumārila responds that although the *ātman* is eternal, it can be connected with different *states*, and it can be both an agent and patient. The distinction between substantial entities and their states may be considered straightforward: I am the same Christopher Bartley, although my thoughts, feelings and moods are changing. I have a life history that is extended through time, but I cannot be identical with the events comprising that history. If I were, it would make no sense to say that on some particular occasion 'I could have done otherwise than I did' because that would be to talk about another life history.

The Buddhists, echoed by Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons*, promote a reductionist view of the self as a 'series person'. They deny that we are persisting individuals, enduring substances that are wholly present throughout the course of their existence. What we really are is a causally related series or stream of mental and physical occurrences (*skandhas*: body, feelings, sensory perceptions, conceptual thoughts and inherited traits), which may be described impersonally or from a third-personal point of view. Interrelated physical and mental events constitute a person's life. This is coupled with the thesis of the essential temporality of beings (*kṣaṇikatva*): mental events and acts are momentary and self-contained occurrences that somehow constitute themselves as streams.

In the course of the eighteenth chapter of his *Ślokavārttika*, Kumārila engages with this outlook and argues for a conception of the persisting Self (*ātman*) as the ultimate subject of mental acts and experiences. Only such an entity can be the guaranteed recipient of the benefits of ritual. People are only going to be interested in ultimate release from rebirth if there is an identity that will be released. His arguments are transcendental ones: continuity of experience presupposes a single, enduring subject that is a further fact over and above the stream of experiences and life-history. In fact, the resulting picture of 'the self' is a pretty minimalist one. There has to be a constant

subject if we are to make sense of the synthesis of experiences. This subject is like Kant's purely formal 'I' that accompanies all representations. It is not to be confused with a personality or individual life.

The Buddhist interprets 'person' as meaning 'a series of experiences' (*saṃtāna*). Kumārila says that the expression 'series' may mean either a temporal succession of momentary psycho-physical events, or it may mean a real unity that is not reducible to its components but which emerges from them. In the first case, the series is really impersonal and expressible in third personal terms ('there is the thought P'; 'the feeling F is happening'; 'the decision D is being made'). As such the series cannot be considered as a genuinely personal agent or subject. In the second case, the series might well be a single subject compatibly with the diversity of its experiences. But now we are very close to the notion of a stable self. He observes that identifying something as '*this series*' presupposes that here is some sort of unity present and this involves abandonment of reductionism about persons. Even if it were possible convincingly to reformulate reports of mental states in third personal terms and still be true to the character of our mental lives, we would need to be able to relativize those reports to a 'series-life' because something has to own the experiences. We would still need some explanation of why a series of physical and mental events constitute one life. It is looking like the notion of a series-life is parasitic upon that of a person as usually understood.

It is not enough to take the 'stream' metaphor literally and say that we attribute unity to a succession to a flow of water when we call it a river. Rivers are physical entities and they have banks. It is not clear what the equivalent to the banks are where streams of experiences are concerned. If the self is really just a bundle of perceptions, what ties the bundle together, if not a persisting subject? (A physicalist may say that there is no problem here. Bodies, including neurological events, individuate and underwrite personal continuity through time. But the Buddhists are not physicalists, and they want to make sense of the possibility of rebirth which of course presupposes the possibility of disembodiment at death and re-embodiment at rebirth. This is not a problem for the Indian materialists or Carvākas because they do not believe in rebirth. Most Indian thinkers accept that the body cannot be the subject because (a) it is not conscious and (b) it is a collection of parts and a number of parts only form a system when they are subordinate to another principle that makes them an organized structure.)

In an expression such as, 'I know', the pronoun 'I' expresses a constant subject that is immediately given. Its support, the basis of its use in language,

is the persisting self. The crux in the debate between Kumārila and the Buddhists is whether the subject is a thinking substance (an enduring thing that thinks) or whether it is only an aspect specific to each successive mental event and so different in each and every case. Kumārila argues that if momentary ideas were the subjects of experience, as the Buddhists suppose, there could be no experience of recognition in the form, 'I previously saw this thing and now I am seeing it again'. Kumārila recognizes that the flow of consciousness is always both backward and forward looking, retentive and anticipatory. Consciousness is fundamental to mental states in the sense that it can range over them. The condition of connecting past and present mental states ('I am looking at something that I saw yesterday') is a persisting conscious principle that is not identical with those states. Successive distinct, momentary and self-contained mental states cannot achieve this reconciliation. Now while recognitional thoughts about external objects or other people may be false, 'I-thoughts' are immune to error by misidentification. They cannot relate to anything other than the knowing subject. The subject is not identified in the ways in which external objects are because there is no need for comparison and the assignment of an object to a kind. We might mistake a piece of shell for silver when, under the sway of avarice, stored subconscious traces (*vāsanā*) of a prior perception of silver are revived by the shining surface appearance of a piece of shell. The Buddhist holds that that what we call the recognition of the self is a variety of this type of illusion resulting from confusion of similar moments in a continuum. But Kumārila points out that strictly speaking there is no recognition or memory of the self. It is not something contained in stored traces of prior experiences. If I have an immediate *sense of myself* as the same being over time (this is different from remembering what I had for lunch yesterday), this does not involve a process of recollection like that of the recollection of objects, facts or states of affairs. 'I-experience' is always simply given: it does not have to be recovered. I never have to establish to myself that I am now the same being that I was yesterday. The Buddhist may think that the 'sense of self' is a conventional misconception deriving from ignorance, desire and attachment. This may be a reasonable account of the mechanisms of selfishness. But ignorance, desire and attachment have to belong to something, and the best candidate appears some sort of persisting subject that makes the mistake in the first place.

Kumārila's epistemological stance is a strong version of commonsense realism recognizing that for the most part, cognitions are valid. He thinks that cognitions of a pre-existing objective physical world are always intrinsically

true. Errors and hallucinations sometimes occur, but they can be explained as arising from identifiable defects in the perceptual apparatus, or from the indistinctness of objects. Cognitions can be trusted as valid if they are not contradicted by a subsequent perception. In short, there is no need to check everything. Reliability may be safely assumed.

For a realist like Kumārila, the variety of experience depends upon differences between the objects grasped. The metaphor of 'grasping' is instructive, conveying that objects already exist, independently of any thinker. They are not created or produced by knowledge. There is no veil of representations intervening between the knowing subject, the agent of the act of knowing and the given. Consciousness is not a repository of forms or concepts, but is more like a capacity for activity. When a cognition brings about the property known-ness in an object, that property is accidental: its loss or gain makes no real difference to the object.

We have said that intrinsically valid cognitions are true just in virtue of their occurrence. The Vedic sounds are heard to command the rituals and tell of the supernatural benefits accruing to their performers. (If what is promised is something concrete and it does not happen, this can be blamed on a mistake in the performance of the ritual.) In the cognition of the Vedic mandates, there is no scope for falsehood, no possible standpoint from which they might be criticized and countermanded, and no room for scepticism about their authority.

Thinkers in the early Mīmāṃsā tradition such as Śabara thought of *dharma* as the same as the performance of prescribed actions. But this makes *dharma* as transitory as those actions, with the consequence that we cannot credibly establish a connection between an action and its consequences. The earlier thinkers thought of the rituals as generating an unseen factor called *apūrva* ('something new') or *adṛṣṭa* (something unseen) that transmitted the ritual's effect to the future. But its status and location were vague. Later writers favour the view that *Dharma* is an eternal reality that is *manifested* in the rituals and their consequences. The concept of manifestation is invoked in various contexts to explain occasions where something eternal becomes perceptible in certain conditions. For example, timeless phonemes are manifested in audible sounds. A universal property (*jāti* or *sāmānya*) such as cowness is manifested in individual cows (*vyakti*). *Apūrva* is treated by Kumārila as a power (*śakti*) belonging to *dharma* that belongs to the sacrifices and to the identity of the sacrificers. It activates the fruits of the rituals.

We began by mentioning that ritualism is sometime called the 'earlier Mīmāṃsā' by the Vedāntins who consider themselves in different ways to have superseded the performance of rituals as leading the way to the highest good. They maintain that at best it can only deliver a temporary state of well-being in paradise, followed by a return to lesser incarnations. It is to the Vedāntins that we turn in the next chapter.

Further reading

For the view that meaningful language is essentially prescriptive rather than fact-asserting (and the Vedāntic response), see Lipner (1986), Chapter 1.

Chapters III, IV and IX of Halbfass (1991) are about Vedic orthodoxy, and ritualism and sacrificial causality.

Olivelle (1999) and (2005) translate the texts that concern the practical applications of *Dharma*.

Act Four of Jayanta's *Much Ado about Religion* (Dezső, 2005) sees a debate about the authority of the Vedas.

Matilal (1990) Chapter X ('Words and Sentences') expounds *abhihitānvaya* versus *anvitābhidhāna*.

Scharf (1996) has a long section on words and meanings, accompanied by translations of typical *Mīmāṃsaka* argumentation.

Eltschinger (2007) is a mine of information about Kumārila. For the latter's epistemology, Taber (2005) is invaluable and contains a richly annotated translation of the chapter on perception in Kumārila's Ślokavārttika.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Why do they put so much weight on the infallible authority of the Vedas?
2. Can the caste hierarchy with its implications that human beings belong to different species be justified?

10 Vedānta

Chapter Outline

The interpretation of the *Upaniṣads*

The word 'Vedānta' literally means 'the end of the Vedas', where end means the *Upaniṣads*. Vedānta is the systematic interpretation of the *Upaniṣads* (collectively termed '*śruti*' or 'what has been *heard*') either by direct commentary upon them or by elaborate explanations of the aphoristic summaries of their contents in the *Brahma-Sūtras*. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is also a key authority. With the Epics (the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*) and *Purāṇas*, the *Gītā* is included in the category of traditional authorities called *smṛti* or 'what has been remembered'. The latter has the function of elucidating and corroborating *śruti*.

There are three antagonistic traditions of thought: *Advaita-Vedānta* which is a metaphysical monism saying that fundamentally reality is undifferentiated consciousness; *Viśiṣṭādvaita-Vedānta* which means the unity of a complex reality; and *Dvaita-Vedānta,* which is a strict monotheism and a realistic metaphysical pluralism. They all agree that eternal scripture (*śruti*) is the sole means of knowing (*pramāṇa*) about what is beyond the scope of sensory perception and inference. *Vedāntins* hold that it is the *Upaniṣads*, the 'knowledge portion' (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*) of the *Vedas* that reveal the truths that we need to

know about the Absolute Reality (*Brahman*), the soul (*ātman*) and the relation between the two, the origin of the universe from the *Brahman*, the consequentiality of actions (*karma*), transmigration (*saṃsāra*) as well as the means to and nature of ultimate liberation from rebirth (*mokṣa/mukti*).

All Vedāntins will agree with the grammarian Bhartṛhari's observation that even if something is inferred by clever logicians with a big effort, there will always be cleverer ones who come up with another explanation [*Vākyapadīya* 1.42]. As Rāmānuja puts its: 'A theory that rests exclusively on human concepts may at some other time or place be refuted by arguments devised by cleverer people . . . The conclusion is that with regard to supernatural matters, Scripture alone is the epistemic authority and that reasoning is to be used only in support of Scripture' [*Śrī Bhāṣya* 2.1.12].

Vedāntins aim to construct a systematic and coherent interpretation of the *Upaniṣads*, in accordance with a principle that they form a single body of literature with a unified overall purport (*tātparya*). The Vedāntins follow common exegetical norms and techniques in order to identify specific coherent contexts of meaning (*eka-vākyatā*) and then demonstrate that these contexts themselves fit together. As far a possible, the exegete must construe the texts in their literal senses. The principal Upaniṣads were probably composed over a very long period of time (roughly 800 B.C. to 300 B.C.) and long before the first extant Vedāntic systematizations (c. 700 A.D.). Their contents are diverse. They do not obviously teach a single coherent message. Moreover, they are often obscure. The abbreviated summaries of the topics of which they treat (the *Brahma-Sūtras*) are frequently ambiguous. So there was ample scope for very different interpretations, and that is exactly what we find.

Whereas the theorists of ritual performance (*Pūrva-Mīmāṃsakas*) were concerned with and insisted upon the primary meaningfulness of Vedic action-commands (*vidhi*) bearing on ritual performance, *Vedāntins* focus upon the fact-asserting or descriptive texts (*arthavāda*) referring to already existent entities or states of affairs, rather than 'things to be done' (*karya*). Both earlier and later Mīmāṃsās developed sophisticated techniques of textual exegesis and argued about whether ritual performance can be a path to salvation with or without intuitive insight into the true nature of reality (*jñāna*), devotion to God (*bhakti*) and divine grace (*prasāda*).

Most Vedāntins accept versions of the Sāṃkhya theory of *satkāryavāda* and say that effects are emanations that do not differ essentially from their underlying or substrative causes. It follows that there is some form of ontological

nexus or parallelism of being (an *analogia entis*) between the world and the Brahman that is its cause. *Madhva* is an exception here in that he denies that there is a real continuity of being between God and the world. He maintains (like the Śaiva Siddhāntins by whose outlook the Dvaita tradition is influenced) that God produces the cosmos out of eternally real prime matter that is distinct from him.

The Bhedābheda tradition of Upaniṣadic interpretation

Before turning to a consideration of some of the major representatives of the different Vedāntic schools, we will mention a tradition of theological thinking that is labelled 'Bhedābheda', meaning 'difference and no-difference'. The idea here is that the Supreme Being has two modes of existence: an unconditioned mode that is the Brahman as it is in itself wherein all differentia have been suppressed, and a conditioned mode that is the emanated cosmos. The cosmos is understood as the real self-differentiation of the One, the substrative cause of all finite existences. The cosmos emerges out of the Absolute Being. Freedom from rebirth is achievable through a combination of works and knowledge. It is the soul's dissolution into the foundational reality.

We have here an attempt to hold together the transcendent unity of divinity and the reality of the plural world. A version of this cosmography is to be found in Ādiśeṣa's *Paramārthasāra*.

Rāmānuja radically modifies this outlook, but as a pupil of Yādavaprakāśa, he is a reliable source of information:

> Bhāskara and his followers say on the basis of the scriptures expressing unity that the Brahman although having every excellent quality such as freedom from evil is conditioned by a limiting condition (*upādhi*) and is bound and released, and is the substrate of transformations (*pariṇāma*) that are various imperfections. [*Vedārthasaṃgraha* para. 8]
>
> Because Bhāskara and his followers do not accept any realities other than the Brahman and the limiting conditions, given the association between the Brahman and the limiting conditions all the defects proper to the latter will apply to the Brahman itself. [Ibid. para. 54]
>
> Yādavaprakāśa and his followers, explaining the exact meaning of the scriptures about unity say that the Brahman, an ocean of unsurpassable and immeasurable noble qualities proper to its nature, is by nature both distinct and not distinct from

> sentient beings, and the abode of many kinds of impure transformations. [Ibid. para. 9]

> Given their assumption that the individual self and the Brahman are both different and non-different, it follows that if the Brahman is essentially the same as the individual souls all the defects belonging to them will belong to it also. If God is essentially constitutive of all the different creatures then he is the identity of each and every one. Such being the case, all their pleasures and pains will belong to him. [Ibid. para. 58]

In the course of his explication of *Brahma-Sūtra* 2.1.15 he attributes to these thinkers the view that the Brahman is the primary cause – an entity that is undifferentiated Being possessed of every potentiality. Prior to the emanation of the cosmos it is self-luminous consciousness that is distinct from the insentient and in which all experiences, pleasant and painful, are stilled. But during the cosmic emanation it exists in tripartite mode as experiencers, objects of experience and the controller. Because of the continuity between cause and effects and the non-difference between the Brahman and the cosmos, all the good and bad features of the produced cosmos affect the Brahman.

Further reading

Nakamura (1990), *History of Vedānta* is comprehensive.

For the *Paramārthasāra* see the text, translation and generous annotation in Danielson (1980).

11 Advaita-Vedānta

Chapter Outline

Discursive thought carries the mind here and there. Attention, extroverted or introverted, is restless. Feelings and moods come and go. Most of life is pervaded by the dualities of means-end rationality, the seeker and the goal, actions and their results. But the meditator absorbed in profound contemplation has neither thoughts nor feelings, nor experience of a world external to consciousness. There is just motionless undifferentiated awareness that does not seek to accomplish any purposes. This state is what Advaita calls 'pure consciousness'. Tranquil consciousness knows no fluctuations. It is not directed towards nor about objects. It is not *about* anything. It has no specific content. It is said to be blissful, for it nothing lacks. There is no sense of selfhood or individuality. There is merely: *being conscious.*

The Advaita tradition is inspired by certain Upaniṣadic passages suggestive of the identity of the soul and the Absolute Reality such as:

> You are That. (*Chāngogya Upaniṣad* 6.8.7: '*tat tvam asi*')
>
> In the beginning, all this was just Being, one only without a second. (*Chāngogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.1)

But many of the scriptures have a dualistic sense, some clearly suggesting a difference between the Brahman and the individual souls and the cosmos, others talking in terms of distinct agents, instruments and goals that are aspects of external religious practices, and others obviously supposing that the Supreme Principle is a being with glorious characteristics. Advaita-Vedānta draws a distinction between the ultimate authority of texts teaching non-difference and those that cannot possibly be construed in a non-dualistic fashion. While this may appear controversial, it is not unprecedented for as we saw above, the Mīmāṃsakas had already distinguished between those texts that prescribe actions (*vidhi*) and those that merely describe how and why to do things (*arthavāda*).

Advaitins say that the essential teaching of the *Upaniṣads* is that what we experience as the differentiated world of interrelated conscious and non-conscious individual entities is really a complex, proliferated misunderstanding superimposed upon the undifferentiated and inactive *Brahman* or Pure Being. That foundational reality is nothing other than the coincidence of Being and static consciousness. Liberation is just the cessation of the ignorance or misconception (*avidyā*) that is responsible for our experiencing reality as fragmented and our misunderstanding ourselves as individual experiencers and agents. While religious activities, ritual and meditative may point one in the right direction by purifying the mind and distracting us from immediate selfish pursuits, they cannot produce enlightenment of liberation from rebirth *directly*.

This is the tradition of those who deny that extroverted religious activity can of itself deliver liberation from rebirth. Enlightenment arises from intuitive insight unmediated by thoughts and words, into the identity of the 'inner self' (*pratyag-ātman*) and the *Brahman*. This is the mystical realization of the equation of Being and Consciousness. It is the manifestation of what one always and already is. While insight obliterates all experience of differentiation and individuality, vestiges of such experience persist in the life of the enlightened one, who is 'liberated while alive' until his release at death. A possible response

on the part of the one who has seen the light is the renunciation of all ritual acts as well as all everyday responsibilities and obligations. Śaṃkara's radical vision is that of the world renouncer (*saṃnyāsin*). Maṇḍana Miśra is more concerned with integrating liberating gnosis into the everyday life of the householder. He recognizes that renouncing social ties and the shared religion is not an easy option. He says that the Vedic rituals purify the mind and prepare the way for realization of one's true identity as the Brahman. Understanding of that identity, conveyed by scripture, is intensified by ritual and contemplation that counteract the still forceful traces of the pluralistic mentality. He recommended the repetitive type of meditation called *prasaṃkhyāna* as a means of removing moral defects and hindrances (*kleśa*) and as a way of internalizing the Upaniṣadic statements conveying non-duality. We shall see Śaṃkara rejecting this version of the view that liberation is the fruit of a combination of works and gnosis.

Śaṃkara

Śaṃkara, one of the founders of the tradition holding that differences are unreal, probably lived around 700 A.D. His major work is a commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*. He also wrote commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gītā* and on individual *Upaniṣads*. Among the many other works attributed to him by the Advaita tradition, the 'Thousand Teachings' or *Upadeśa-Sāhasrī* stands out. His vision is that of the radical renouncer, which ultimately calls into question the values of mainstream orthodoxy by denying that there are any real individual thinkers, agents and acts.

There is no question that Śaṃkara was an original genius, but it should be mentioned that the Advaitic tradition traces itself back to Gauḍapāda who probably lived around 450–500 A.D. and wrote the *Āgama-śāstra* about the *Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad*. He likened the phenomenology of normal experience to that of dreaming and claimed that in both cases it is only the fact of consciousness that remains constant. Individual entities (*bhāva*) are mental constructs (*kalpanā*). The one supreme soul, the waveless absolute, imagines itself as conscious individuals.

Gauḍapāda's contemporary, the grammarian Bhartṛhari taught the 'non-dualism of meaning' (*śabda-advaita*). The idea is that the diversified phenomenal cosmos ('the proliferation of names and forms') is the emanation from a unitary sonic Absolute not of things but of meanings. It is the appearance of the transcendent 'meaning-reality' (*śabda-tattva*), otherwise known as the

Brahman. The Absolute appears to transform itself through its innate powers into meanings, words and sentences. Words and what they mean are identical. The differentiated world of our experience is a product of diversification by language. Reality is a matrix of differentiated meanings rather than things or objects. Ignorance (*avidyā*), our default position as it were, is a function of linguistic proliferation into individual words and propositions. It consists in understanding the world in term of the individual entities that are the referents of words and resting content at that level. Bhartṛhari's linguistic idealism exercised a considerable influence on Maṇḍana Miśra as well as on the monistic Śaiva traditions.

In common with many classical Indian philosophers, Śaṃkara's soteriological goal is the freedom of the authentic self (*ātman*) from rebirth. The *ātman* cannot be captured by concepts and words. It will only reveal itself, and that is something over which we have no control and upon which our activities have no effect. *Ātman* here means something like 'true nature' or fundamental identity. It is different from embodied individual personality, from caste-based social rôle, and from the *psychological* functions of thinking and feeling, as well as the sense of being an agent interacting with the external world. All of those involve a misidentification of what one really is with some aspect of objectivity. Nothing that one can objectify, including thoughts and feelings, can be the true self. We are approaching the notion of the 'transcendental subject', the pre-condition of having any sort of coherent experience. The notion of subjectivity here is neither individual nor personal. It is not a particular perspective. We must remember that the state of release involves no experiences of which anything might be the subject.

The word *ātman* is usually translated as 'self' and sometimes as 'soul'. But the semantic range is broader. It is perfectly normal to speak of the '*ātman*' of an entity such as a pot (*ghaṭa*). The compound '*Ghaṭa-ātmā*' does not mean 'the self of a pot', let alone its soul, but the nature or identity of pots. The original meaning was something like 'vital breath'. The word then came to mean the spirit that is the essence of a sentient being. Thence developed the meaning 'the self' and 'the soul'. Often the masculine singular forms operate as reflexive pronouns such as 'oneself', 'herself' 'itself' 'themselves'. As such it is synonymous with '*sva*' (one's/its own). With the rise of theistic forms of Vedānta, a theological concept of self as The Soul, expressing the individual as related to divinity, became prominent. But this concept is foreign to the gnostic traditions, such as Advaita.

Śaṃkara thinks that the *ātman* is revealed when what had thought of itself as individual manifests its nature as one and the same as the Brahman, the

unconditioned and unchanging reality that is the coincidence of being and pure consciousness. Such manifestation can never be a direct result of human activity, although it may precede by religious practices that purify our consciousness. Śaṃkara's vision of an absolutely impersonal and non-relational state is an austere one, and it is mollified by other Advaita Vedāntins who say that the ultimate state is 'Being, Consciousness *and* Bliss'.

The Advaitin view is that we can neither satisfactorily explain why there is a world of change and multiplicity nor why we find ourselves here. Relative to the Brahman the diversified cosmos is less than fully real. All experience of individuality and plurality is somehow the product of beginningless ignorance or misunderstanding (*avidyā*). The world is sometimes liked to a magician's utterly convincing illusions. But the working of *avidyā* is simply inexplicable. It is neither being nor non-being. But aetiological explanations can be put on one side. The important thing is to *realize* the truth and thus escape from rebirth.

Let us begin our exploration of Advaita-Vedānta with some extracts from Śaṃkara's introduction to his commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* [BSB].

BSB 1 1.1

Given that it is impossible that there should be any real relation between Subject and Object, whose spheres are the concepts of the first person and the third person, whose natures are opposed like light and darkness, and that all the more impossible is any real relation between their properties, then it is logical to hold that it is mistaken to superimpose (*adhyāsa*) what is objective and its properties on the first personal subject that is consciousness, and conversely to superimpose subjectivity and its properties on the third personal objective order of things.

Nevertheless, there is natural everyday behaviour expressed in the thoughts, 'I am this' and 'this is mine', which combine the real and the unreal. The cause is misunderstanding of the radically distinct subject and object, involving a failure to discriminate the two, and the superimposition of the natures and properties of each upon the other.

Superimposition is the manifestation in consciousness, in the form of memory, of something previously seen in another place. Some say that superimposition is the attribution to an object of properties seen in another case. Some say that it is an error caused by a failure to discriminate between two things. Others say that it is imaginative construction of properties that an object does not in fact possess.

But all the accounts agree that superimposition is the appearance to consciousness of the features of one thing in something else. Such is the everyday experience of mother of pearl's looking like silver and the moon's appearing double.

But how can there be superimposition of objects and their properties on the Inner Self, the transcendental subject, that is never an object? One superimposes an

object on another object that is present, and you say that the inner self is never an object.

We reply that the denial that the Inner Self is an object requires some qualification because it may be intimated by the concept 'I' and because it is familiar in virtue of its immediacy. It is not a rule that people only superimpose an object on another one that is present: people superimpose colour on the sky. So there is no contradiction in the superimposition of what is not self on the Inner Self. Superimposition as defined above the learned consider as ignorance (*avidyā*). They say that knowledge is the ascertainment of the true nature of an entity by means of discrimination.

The two-way superimposition of subjective and objective that is called ignorance is the precondition of all religious and secular activities, of all behaviour involving objects and means of knowing (*pramāṇa*), and of all the scriptures whether concerned with ritual injunctions, prohibitions or liberation.

But how can the scriptures and means of knowledge relate to what is infected by ignorance?

We reply that the means of knowing cannot function unless there is an individual knowing subject that has misidentified itself as 'I' and 'mine' in relation to the body, mind and sense-faculties. There can be no perception without sense-faculties and no operation of the sense-faculties without a body. And no one acts unless the body has been superimposed upon the soul. In the absence of the two-way superimposition of soul and not-soul, the Inner Self would not misconceive itself as an individual agent of knowing. And without the agent of knowing, the means of knowing cannot operate. In this way, the scriptures and means of knowing relate to what is infected by ignorance.

Where scripturally ordained religious activities are concerned, the suitably qualified individual is aware that he is related to higher worlds. But that qualification for religious practice does not derive from a Vedānta-based understanding of the Inner Self's not being involved in rebirth and its exemption from caste-status. Prior to knowledge of the true nature of the transcendental subject, scripture continues to operate with regard to matters infected by ignorance. Scriptures such as, 'A Brahmin must sacrifice' function only if there is superimposition on the transcendental subject of such specifics as caste, stage of life, age and circumstances.

One superimposes external features on the Inner Self when one thinks, 'I am doing well' or 'Things are going badly' with respect to factors such as one's family. One superimposes physical features when one thinks, 'I am fat' or 'I am walking'. One superimposes properties of the mind such as desires, intentions and judgments.

In these ways, the ego is superimposed upon the transcendental subject that is really the passive witness of experiences. Conversely, the conscious nature of the subject is superimposed on the mind and so forth.

Thus there is a beginningless and endless natural process of superimposition, whose nature is misconception, which creates agents and experiencers, and is directly known to everyone.

Authentic Being

For Śaṃkara, the fact that awareness occurs as the same in all cognitions shows that it is the basic reality. In his commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā* 2.16. ('Of the non-existent, there is no coming into being: there is no ceasing to be of the existent. The difference between the two is seen by those who understand the truth.') Śaṃkara formulates a substantial conception of 'Being' as the changeless basis of all finite and transitory beings. 'Being' thus understood is not involved in causal relations and is outside space and time. In the background here is a reaction to Dharmakīrti's espousal of dynamic causal efficacy as criterial of reality, with its entailment that anything permanent, in so far as it is static, would be unreal.

Unconditioned being is the foundational cause of the cosmos. Its genuine features (*jātīyaka-dharma*), as opposed to those conditions (*upādhi*) that we, or some scriptures, might superimpose upon it are universal presence, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence and its being the true identity of everyone. Nothing finite and nothing whose existence depends upon its relation to other things can be truly real. The same applies to anything that is a product. Products are transformations (*vikāra*) and a transformation (being a derivation) lacks a nature of its own. Thought expresses something truly real when it is constant and unvarying, and when a thought expresses something that comes and goes, then it concerns what is other than Being.

Bhagavad Gītā 2.17: Asks the question, 'What is "Being" that exists timelessly?' Śaṃkara replies that it is the condition of the possibility of anything: Everything is pervaded by the Brahman, called Being. This Reality never deviates from the nature that is its own because it has no parts. It cannot suffer loss because it has no properties. It is the true identity (*ātman*) of everyone. Commenting on *Gītā* 2.18, he says that this timeless, changeless and indestructible identity cannot be determined by any of the means of knowing (*pramāṇa*). Dismissing the suggestion that it is determined by scripture and by perception, he responds that transcendental subjectivity establishes its own existence (*svataḥ siddha*). It is only if such subjectivity, *qua* knowing subject, is already a given that inquiry using *pramāṇas* by one who seeks to know is possible. We could not act with a view to understanding knowable objects unless we had already understood ourselves as subjects. The transcendental subject is a given, a presupposition of the sort of experience that we have. Scripture is the ultimate *pramāṇa* in the sense that it has its epistemic authority about the transcendental subject only by stripping away properties that have

been mistakenly superimposed upon that identity, and not by providing new information to us about something previously unknown.

From Śaṃkara's *Upadeśa Sāhasrī* (p.68):

> Permanently unchanging consciousness, whose nature is self-luminosity, establishes its own existence since it does not need a means of knowing for itself. [Everything in the world requires consciousness to reveal or establish its existence. But consciousness is unique in not needing anything external to establish it: it is self-revealing.] Anything other [than consciousness] that is insentient exists for the sake of something else, since it functions in complexes. And in so far as that which exists for the sake of the something else produces experiences of pleasure, pain and delusion, it follows that it is what is not the self. Hence its existence (*astitva*) is not authentically real (*parama¯rtha*). Just as the contents of illusions have no real existence apart from consciousness, so everyday experience of differentiation has no real existence apart from consciousness. And the permanently unchanging nature of the light of consciousness, the authentic reality, follows from its uninterrupted presence. It is the state of non-differentiation because it is unvarying in the midst of all the different ideas presented to consciousness, while the different ideas come and go. Just as the different ideas that come and go in dreams are said not to exist in reality, so the different ideas inconstantly presented to waking consciousness must be unreal too. Because there is no perspective on consciousness other than that of consciousness itself, it is not the sort of thing that can be accepted or rejected, and there is nothing else.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 1.1.31

> Scriptures such as '*tat tvam asi*' ('You are that') and '*ahaṃ brahma asmi*' ('I am the Brahman') show that what is called the 'individual self' is not ultimately distinct from the Brahman. It is the Brahman that is called 'individual person' the agent and the experiencer when it is regarded as diversified a result of properties (*upādhi*) superimposed upon it, such as body mind and sense-faculties. Some passages reveal the true nature of Pure Being by negating differentia resulting from the superimposition of features. They focus attention on one's inner identity (*pratyag-ātman*).
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> *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya* 2.3.7 – 'Where there is a modification, there is division – as in everyday life.'
>
> The plural world consisting of entities that are modifications (*vikāra*) is characterised by separations between entities, but what is not a product (*avikṛtam*) is not found to be divided. The atmosphere is understood as differentiated from the earth and so on. Hence it must be an effect. It follows that space, time, the mind and the atoms are effects.
>
> – But surely the Soul (*ātman*) is also divided from the atmosphere etc, so must it not also be an effect?
>
> The Soul is not a modification of anything because that would mean that it is an effect.

> We cannot deny the reality of the Soul, because of its very nature. The Self is not a contingent property of anything else since it establishes its own existence and that existence is not established by any of the means of knowing (*pramāṇa*). One uses the means of knowing to establish previously unknown objects of knowledge. But the Self, because it is the basis of the exercise of the means of knowing, is established prior to their functioning. The rejection of a reality of that sort is impossible. A person may deny the existence of some entity or another, but he cannot deny the subject doing the rejecting.
>
> In expressions such as 'I know something present', 'I have known something past' and 'I shall know something future, the objects known differ as present past and future, but the knower does not change because by nature it is wholly present through the entire course of experience.'

The point here is that although one's worldly experiences occur in temporal sequence, it is a datum of consciousness that one's core identity is not extended in time: it is not constituted by temporal parts or phases.

Most followers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition hold that while we have or are persisting identities, those identities are not intrinsically conscious. They say that cognitions (and feelings, desires and intentions) are contingent properties that occur when the embodied *ātman* is connected with a mind (*manas*), the material faculty that co-ordinates sensory data. Śaṃkara addresses this view under *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya* 2.3.18:

> [The opposing view]: If consciousness were a permanent feature it would persist in the states of deep sleep, swoon and demonic possession. But people report that they did not experience anything in such states. But in normal life people are actively intelligent. Hence, given that consciousness is not a permanency, the *ātman* is only contingently conscious.
>
> We reply that knowing consciousness is permanent and it is one's real identity because it is not produced. Unchanging pure being exists as the individual person when it is associated with superimposed properties. Scripture reveals that consciousness is the true nature of pure being in definitional passages like, 'The Brahman is knowledge and bliss' and 'The Brahman is reality, consciousness, infinite'. If the individual really shares the nature of the unconditioned reality, then permanent consciousness is its essential nature.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.3.30

> As long as one's identity is that of a transmigrator, as long as the *saṃsāric* state has not been terminated by realisation of one's true identity, association of the soul with some mind and personality continues. And while there is a relation to the superimposed property (*upādhi*) that is the mind then there is individual personality and the series of births. But in reality there is no individual person apart

from the nature that is fabricated by relation to the superimposed property that is the mind. This relation of the superimposed property that is the mind to one's real identity presupposes misconception (*mithyājñāna*) and misconception continues until knowledge arises. So as long as there is no comprehension of Pure Being, connection with the superimposed property that is the mind obtains.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.3.40 answers the question whether agency is innate and natural (*svābhāvikam*) to one's identity, or is it a superimposed property?

> Agency does not belong to one's true identity because it would follow that there could be no liberation from rebirth. Were agency an essential feature of identity, it could never be separated from it, just as heat is inseparable from fire. The ultimate human good cannot happen unless one is free from agency because agency always involves suffering . . . Agency is not essential because it is one of the properties superimposed upon the fundamental identity.
>
> The enlightened realise that there is no individual person; no agent and no enjoyer of experiences, all of which are concepts superimposed upon the true self.
>
> But surely if there are no real personal agents distinct from body, mind and sense-faculties and distinct from the higher self, then it must be the higher self that is the transmigrator, the agent and the enjoyer.
>
> No – because agency and experience are presentations due to *avidyā*. Scriptures reveal that being and agent and experiencer belong to the sphere of *avidyā*. Agency is not an essential feature of the Soul.
>
> It could be argued that agency must be an essential feature of one's identity because otherwise the scriptures enjoining actions would have no purpose.
>
> We respond that scriptural injunctions teach that certain things are to be done and thus presuppose an appropriate sort of agency. But it is not the case that this agency is essential to the soul, because the scriptures teach that one is identical with unconditioned being. The scriptural injunctions presuppose the type of agency that is fabricated by ignorance. Passages such as, 'the agent, the person whose nature is understanding' (Praśna Up. 4.9) refer to the agency fabricated by ignorance.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.3.46

> The painful experience of the individual person is not something truly real but is occasioned by a mistaken failure to discriminate between one's true identity and the superimposed properties (mind, body and sense-faculties) that are fabricated by ignorance.

It is a cardinal Advaitin tenet that the notion of difference does not apply to the Brahman or 'pure being'. There is nothing else from which it could differ, and it has no intrinsic complexity. It is just undifferentiated static consciousness.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 3.2.11

Some scriptural passages refer to the Brahman as possessing differentia (*sa-viśeṣam*) while other say that it lacks differentia (*nirviśeṣam*). Does this mean that the Brahman has both a conditioned and an unconditioned nature?

Śaṃkara responds that the unconditioned reality cannot intrinsically possess two natures because it is illogical that one and the same reality should both intrinsically have and lack characteristics such as colour and shape. Relation to superimposed properties (*upādhi*) does not involve a change in the real nature of an entity. A brilliant crystal does not become dim by being related to a projected red feature. And the superimposed properties in relation to the Brahman are projected by *avidyā*. We must understand that of the two sorts of characteristics, the one of the Brahman as void of every differentia and beyond discursive thought is the true one.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 3.2.14–15

The Brahman has no forms (*ākāra*) such as colour and shape. As scripture says, 'The Brahman is without before and after. There is nothing inside or outside of it. The Brahman is the identity that experiences everything' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.5.19.) These passages refer to the transcendent (*niṣprapañca*) nature of pure being, so it must be understood that it is formless.

Other scriptural passages that refer to the Brahman as having form are not primarily about the Brahman, but are instructions to contemplate the supreme reality in certain ways.

There is no problem about the fact that some texts teach meditation on the Brahman as having some specific forms. This sort of attribution of characteristics does not compromise our view that the Brahman does not have a twofold nature although properties are superimposed upon it. When something is due to a superimposed property (*upādhi*), it cannot be a genuine property of an entity. And the superimposed properties are fabricated due to ignorance. We have already explained that primal ignorance is the precondition of all religious and secular dealings.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 3.2.18

Because the nature of unconditioned pure being is consciousness, void of differentia, beyond mind and language and conveyed by the negation of all finite characteristics, the scriptures teaching freedom from rebirth use the simile of the sun reflected in water, meaning that the Brahman's having different features is not the real truth because those features are properties that have been superimposed.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 3.2.21

> Being and consciousness coincide in the Brahman. They are not distinct properties. The supposition that the Brahman has a mode of being that excludes consciousness and another mode that has the form of consciousness that is other than being implies that it is internally complex. Being is just consciousness and consciousness is just being. They are not mutually exclusive, so conceptual analysis (*vikalpa*) about whether the Brahman is either Being or consciousness or both is groundless. Scriptural texts that speak of the Brahman under certain forms have their own positive purpose: they do not merely have the significance of denying that finite features of the cosmos pertain to the Brahman. When features of the cosmos are mentioned in passages enjoining meditation – such as, 'It is made of mind: the vital breaths are its body; its appearance is light' the text does not have the purpose of suppressing plurality but that of enjoining meditation.

The inexpressibility of the Brahman

We have seen that one's true identity as the Brahman, and the unreality of all differences and individuality are revealed by some of the scriptures. But the nature of the Absolute state cannot really be expressed by concepts and words. Śaṃkara understands *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 2.3.6 as referring to the Brahman and reads the passage as, 'Now there is the teaching, "It is not this. It is not that". There is no better expression than, "not this". This is the designation of the truth about reality.' The formula is meaningful by eliminating all limiting conditions.

> It expresses something that has no distinguishing features (name form, actions, differences, class-property or qualities) that are the reasons for the application of words. Brahman has no distinguishing features. Therefore it is not possible to describe it as such and such. Brahman may be described by means of names, forms and actions that are superimposed upon it. But when we want to express its proper form that is devoid of every specific limiting condition, then it is not possible to describe it in any way. There is only one way left – namely, the designation, 'Not this, not this' i.e. by the negation of all possible descriptions.

Bhagavad Gītā-Bhāṣya 13.12b

> Unconditioned Absolute is beginningless. It is not said to be Being or non-Being.

This text is tremendously influential in the Advaitin tradition. Among other things, it was taken as stating that there can be no continuity of being

(*analogia entis*) between the Brahman and anything belonging to the cosmos. The formula 'Inexpressible as being or non-being' was also applied to *avidyā* and its works. What Śaṃkara actually says here is that it means that the Absolute is not the sort of empirical thing that either could or could not exist. It is not knowable by conventional means adapted to our world, but only by Scripture. He also says:

> It stands to reason that the unconditioned reality (*Brahman*) cannot be directly expressed by words such as 'being' and 'non-being' for words are ordinarily used to reveal some object, and when they are heard they convey a conventional meaning, by expressing the kind to which an object belongs, or some action, quality or relation. Thus 'cow' and 'horse' express kinds, 'he cooks' and 'he reads' express actions, 'white' and 'black' express qualities, and 'having wealth' and 'possessing cows' express relations. But Brahman does not belong to a kind, so it cannot be expressed by words such as 'being' or 'non-being'. Because it is without characteristics, it has no qualities such that it might be expressed by words for them. Because it is unchanging it cannot be expressed by action-words. Because it is non-relational, unique, non-objectifiable and the Inner Self of all, it cannot be expressed by any word.

What about those Scriptures that speak of the Absolute in anthropomorphic terms? The answer is:

> That which is totally other than the cosmos is explained by the provisional attribution of features to it followed by a demonstration that they are inappropriate.

The path of active religious practices is insufficient for enlightenment

All Vedāntins hold that the scriptures, meaning the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, are the only means of knowing (*pramāṇa*) the Brahman, the unconditioned absolute reality, the Being of beings. Śaṃkara thinks that some scriptural passages generate an unmediated intuition into the *identity* of the true self and the Brahman. Knowledge is enough: it is the necessary and sufficient condition of liberation. This soteriology is resisted by those who think that the scriptures are primarily about religious practices, rituals and types of meditation, as the way to liberation. The scriptures tell us what do and how to do it. They command us to bring about states of affairs. They do not provide information or state facts about already established realities, except when such

information contributes to the accomplishment of religious activities. Statements of fact are meaningful only as supplementary to action-commands. The scriptures do not teach about already established realities, since those are within the province of *pramāṇas* like perception and inference. Some Vedantins, such as Maṇḍana Miśra, understood the function of scripture in this framework. They thought that the scriptures bear upon the Brahman by treating it as the object of meditation. That is, the scriptural statements primarily enjoin the activity of meditation. The Brahman is the focus of meditation. So the scriptures treat of Brahman only indirectly as something that is to be realized by religious activity. Śaṃkara rejects this outlook. Actions are always oriented towards results. They presuppose duality and individuality. The framework of means and ends and the associated instrumentalist mentality are part and parcel of the perpetuation of *saṃsāra*. Liberation is simply the manifestation of the soul's true identity. It is not something to be produced or obtained and thus is not connected with the performance of acts, be they ritual performances or meditations. The importance of this topic is reflected in the extent of his commentary on *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya* 1.1.4.:

> The *Brahman*, the omniscient and omnipotent foundational cause of the origination, stasis and dissolutions of the universe, is understood from the *Upaniṣads* because all their statements agree in conveying that reality as their meaning. For instance there are:
>
> 'In the beginning, this cosmos was being alone, one without anything else' and 'In the beginning, this cosmos was the one *ātman*.' Once it has been understood that the words in such passages cohere with each other in bearing upon the real nature of the *Brahman*, it would be mistaken to assume another meaning, for that would involve imagining what is not scriptural teaching and abandoning the scriptural teaching. It is not the case that such fact-asserting passages are to be understood as expounding the natures of agents [involved in ritual performances] because there are scriptural texts that repudiate the fruits of ritual activities, such as 'Whom might one see and by what means?'
>
> The *Brahman*, although it is a fully accomplished reality, does not fall within the province of means of knowing such as perception and inference, because the identity of the *Brahman* as one's true self can only be known from the scripture, 'That thou art'.
>
> As for the view that the Vedāntic teaching is meaningless in that it is not concerned with matters to be actively pursued or avoided – this is not a problem for us who say that the ultimate good is achieved, after the destruction of all afflictions, merely by knowledge of one's identity as the Brahman, which is not something to be pursued or avoided. It is true that there are subordinate

references to divinities and individuals in scriptural passages primarily enjoining the practice of meditation, but this does not contradict our position. The *Brahman* cannot be subordinate to injunctions to meditate because once one has realised that one's true identity is the *Brahman*, there is an end to thinking in dualistic terms about rites and constituents of events and there is nothing to be pursued or avoided. Once the dualistic mentality, which thinks of the *Brahman* as supplementary to injunctions to meditate, has been eradicated by understanding identity [of the *Brahman* and the self], it cannot arise again.

While some Vedic passages have authority by being injunctive, one cannot impugn the authority of those scriptures that have knowledge of the self as their result. The epistemic authority of scripture cannot be known by inference, because there are no analogous instances that could be cited as part of the argument. Thus it is settled that scripture is the means of knowing the Brahman.

* * *

An opposing view, from someone like Maṇḍana Miśra who thinks that liberation is the fruit of meditation, rather than just knowledge:

The purport of scripture is not mere understanding but religious activity, in this case meditation or contemplation.

Reply: Although scripture is the means of knowing about the *Brahman*, still scripture teaches that the *Brahman* is something that should be meditated upon (*pratipatti-vidhi-viṣayatā*), in the way in which certain factors (e.g. the sacrificial post) are taught as subordinate aspects of ritual activities. This is because scripture is concerned with ritual actions and abstentions. Scripture is meaningful by moving people to action or by restraining them. Anything else is relevant in so far as it is *supplementary* to action-injunctions.

In the same way, the *Upaniṣadic* statements are meaningful. Given that scripture is injunctive, just rituals such as the *Agnihotra* are enjoined for the person who is intent on paradise, so knowledge of the *Brahman* is enjoined as an activity for the one intent upon immortality.

Preliminary reply: There is a radical distinction between two kinds of inquiry: in the ritual portions of scripture, the ritual duty that one wants to know is something that is to be brought into being, but our quest is for the *Brahman* that is always and already fully accomplished. The fruit of knowledge of the Brahman must be distinct from the fruit of the knowledge of ritual duty that depends upon performances.

Response from the opponent: No, there is no difference because the *Brahman* is taught as connected with injunctions to perform actions by texts such as 'the Self is to be visualised' and 'Everyone should meditate upon the Self'. The injunctions stimulate the desire to know the natures the Self and the *Brahman* and the

Upaniṣads apply by teaching its proper form as eternally omniscient, all-pervasive, pure knowledge, liberated, consciousness and bliss. By meditating on that proper form there arises freedom from rebirth, unknown by ordinary means but known from scripture. If the *Upaniṣads* taught established facts without reference to injunctions to perform ritual actions, they would be meaningless because not connected with things to be pursued or avoided.

A query: But a fact-assertive statement such as, 'this is a rope, not a snake' is seen to be meaningful by removing fear produced by a misperception. Likewise, the *Upaniṣads* are meaningful by removing the misconception about transmigration when they teach the reality of the non-transmigrating Self.

Reply: this would be the case if the misconception about transmigration were removed merely by hearing about the proper form of the *Brahman*, just as the mistake about the snake is removed just by hearing about the rope. But it does not cease. Although the *Brahman* has been heard about, features of transmigratory life are seen to continue as before. This is why there are injunctions that one should meditate, after hearing about the *Brahman*.

Hence, it must be understood that scripture is a means of knowing the Brahman in that it is the object to injunctions to meditate.

Śaṃkara now replies: The above view is mistaken because of the radical difference between the results of the knowledge of the *Brahman* and knowledge about ritual actions. Actions called duty (*dharma*) are known from the scriptures. This is the province of the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*, which also tell us what to do and what not. The consequences of right and wrong acts, success and failure, produced by contact with the objects of the senses, are perceptible pleasures and pains experienced physically and are known to apply to all creatures from the creator deity *Brahma* down to inanimate things. Scripture teaches that there is a hierarchy of pleasures amongst living beings and from these a hierarchy of dharmas is inferred. From the hierarchy of dharmas there is a hierarchy of qualified practitioners. The latter accords with what people aim at and their ability to pay. Those who perform sacrifices for the public good follow the higher path because of their special knowledge. The southern path is followed by those who perform rituals for themselves. That there are gradations (*tāratmya*) in enjoyments in those superior realms is known from the scripture, 'dwelling there until merit is used up'. Likewise we know that degrees of enjoyments amongst terrestrial beings (and below) are consequences of *dharmas* indicated by Vedic mandates. The gradation in embodied pleasures and pains, occasioned by the hierarchy of *dharma* and *adharma*, on the part of those subject to defects such as ignorance is known from scripture and reasoning to be the nature of transmigratory existence. 'There is no end to pleasure and pain for the embodied one' refers to the nature of transmigration as just portrayed. 'Pleasure and pain do not touch the disembodied' teaches that the disembodied state called liberation (*mokṣa*) is not the product of the right actions specified by Vedic mandates. Liberation cannot be the product of the performance

of ritual duty, since liberation is the natural state of the soul. Scripture teaches that the eternally disembodied state called liberation is utterly different from the fruits of prescribed actions.

Some permanent things, such as earth and the qualities posited by the Sāṃkhyas, may change and still retain their identity. But the permanence we are talking about is absolute, all pervading like the atmosphere, free from every sort of modification, self-sufficient, impartite and self-illuminating. Where merit, demerit, their results and the passage of time do not apply, that is the disembodied reality called liberation. It is the same as the *Brahman*. Were that being taught as something subordinate to the performance of actions, and if liberation were to be accomplished by prescribed actions, it would be impermanent. In fact, it would be at the top of the hierarchy of impermanent states that are the fruits of action. But everyone agrees that liberation is permanent. Thus it is illogical that the *Brahman* is taught as subordinate to prescribed actions.

Many scriptures such as 'He who knows the *Brahman* becomes that *Brahman*' teach that liberation is the immediate consequence of knowledge of the *Brahman* and rule out any action intervening. No prescribed action intervenes between the vision of the *Brahman* and the realisation of pure consciousness as the nature of everything. Other passages reveal that the sole result of knowledge of the self's identity with the *Brahman* is just the removal of obstacles to liberation. The *Nyāya-Sūtras* say the same: release occurs immediately after the destruction of misconceptions. . . .' There is removal of misconception as a result of knowledge of the identity of the self and the *Brahman*. . . . Knowledge of the *Brahman* does not depend upon human activity. Rather, it depends upon reality, like knowledge of mind-independent entities that are objects of *pramāṇas* such as perception. ['knowledge of an entity as it is in itself does not depend upon human ideas but only on the reality itself . . . knowledge of established entities depends upon reality.' *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya*.1.1.2]. We cannot rationally suppose that such an Unconditioned Reality, or knowledge of it, has any connection with things to be brought about. The *Brahman* cannot be something to be brought about as if it were the object of the action of knowing. Scriptures declare that the *Brahman* is not within the scope of knowing or contemplation.

But if the *Brahman* is not an object, how can scripture be the source of knowledge about it?

We reply that scripture has the force of removing differences fabricated by ignorance. Scripture does not intend to teach that the *Brahman* is a specific object (belonging to a kind of things). Rather, scripture leads the mind away from differentiation, such as that between objects, subjects and acts of knowledge, that has been fabricated by ignorance, teaching that the Brahman is never an object because it is one's own inner reality. . . . Because scripture teaches the proper form of the eternally released self by dispelling the belief, fabricated by ignorance, that transmigration is a reality, we cannot be accused of holding that

liberation is a transitory state. It is logical for someone who holds that liberation is something to be produced, or that it is a transformation of the self, to say that is depends upon mental, verbal or physical effort. In either case the non-permanence of freedom from rebirth is the certain conclusion.

Freedom from rebirth does not depend upon action as if it were something to be accomplished. It is not something to be accomplished because it is the already and always real nature of one's identity. Even if the *Brahman* were different from one's true identity, it would not be something to be attained because it is all pervading and always present to everyone.

Release is not the product of ritual purification, which would make it depend upon human activity. Such purification comes about by the removal of defects or the acquisition of virtues. The latter cannot pertain to liberation since it is the nature of the *Brahman* to which no perfection need be supplied, and there are no defects to be removed. If you say that release is a hidden feature of one's self that is manifested when the self purifies itself by action, we deny this since the self cannot be the substrate of actions. Actions do not exist without modifying their substrates. If the self were changed by action inhering in it, impermanence of the self would result. Hence actions cannot inhere in the true self. The inner self cannot be purified by an action belonging to something external, because it is never an object.

The embodied self may be purified by actions but that which is purified is a self that has been possessed by ignorance and confused with the body. It is this personality that considers itself purified by ritual acts. All actions are performed by the personality that understands itself as an individual centre of consciousness and which enjoys the fruits of actions.

Release is not the product of ritual purification because it is just being the *Brahman*. It has no connection with actions and is the fruit of knowledge alone.

But is not knowing a mental action?

There is an important difference. When an action such as contemplating is mandated, it is independent of facts and dependent upon human mental effort. Although meditation and reflection are mental, whether they are performed or not is a matter of human choice. But knowledge is produced by the valid instruments of knowing. The instruments relate to entities as they are in themselves. Thus it is not possible to create, not create, or change knowledge since it depends only upon already established reality, and not upon Vedic mandates or human minds. To illustrate: when the Veda tells us to contemplate man or woman as fire, that is an action since it is generated by an injunction, and it depends upon some human choice. But the concept of fire depends neither upon Vedic mandate nor human choice. It is a matter of knowledge not action because it depends upon an entity that is the object of perception. The same is to be understood with respect to all the entities that are objects of the valid means of knowing. This being the case, the knowledge of the Brahman as it is does not depend upon Vedic mandates.

But what is the meaning of passages that look like mandates, such as, 'The Self is to be seen, to be heard about'?

We reply that they have the force of diverting attention from natural everyday activities. A person preoccupied with externals, pursuing the objects of desires, does not achieve the ultimate human good. Passages such as 'the self is to be seen' actuate a person who seeks the ultimate good to direct his mind towards the inner self, distracting his attention from mundane activities.

Śaṃkara and the Buddhists

Śaṃkara is accused by some opponents of being a 'closet Buddhist'. Buddhists and Advaitins agree that the notion of selfhood is illusory because constructed out of the interactions between our modes of consciousness and the world. Moreover, like the Buddhists Śaṃkara envisages the evaporation of personal individuality once enlightenment dawns, and blames suffering on ignorance. But the accusation is far from the truth. Śaṃkara's metaphysic is totally different from the Buddhist temporalism that rejects the very notion of enduring identities in favour of successions of phases. Śaṃkara believes that 'behind' the array of changing phenomena there is a single unconditioned reality: the static co-incidence of pure being and consciousness. Relative to Unconditioned Being, the world that we experience is less than fully real, not the genuine article, but there is an ultimate reality enjoyed by depersonalized consciousness. In other words, the cosmos has a real cause (*sat-kāraṇa-vāda*), even if we must be agnostic about the ontological status of entities that 'cannot be determined as either real or unreal'. This is because every phenomenon is ultimately unreal when considered as individual, but real in so far as it participates in the general reality or the *Brahman*.

Let us see what he says about various Buddhist schools:

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.2.18

There are three traditions of Buddhist thought:

Those who say that both material and mental phenomena are real.
Those who say that only mental phenomena are real.
Those who say that there are no intrinsic natures.

To begin with, we refute those who admit the reality of all mental and physical factors. By physical they mean both the four elements and the sense faculties and their respective objects. They say that earth, water, air and fire are combinations of

> four different kinds of atoms. The five constituents (*skandha*) that make up human lives (body, perceptions, feelings, conceptual thoughts and inherited dispositions) are internal and in combination form the basis of all interpersonal dealings.
>
> Here we object that there are two different kinds of combinations: but the reality of these sorts of combinations is unintelligible. This is because the atomic components of the material combinations are non-conscious and the emergence of sentience depends upon the prior existence of some compound. They do not accept any other persisting conscious subject or director who could combine the basic factors. It cannot be the case that the atoms and *skandhas* function spontaneously because that would entail that they would never cease from activity.

We see here the basis of one of the most significant objections to the Buddhist reductionist analysis. It may appear economical, plausible and attractive but it is hard to see how after completing the reduction of entities into their elements there is any way back. It is easy to smash a glass, but impossible to put the pieces back together again. It is not clear that Buddhism can account for the emergence of entities, including the person, from the elements.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.2.19

> The Buddhist says that although there is no persisting subject of experience or director who combines the basic factors, the world process is sustained by the interactive causality of dependently originating factors such as ignorance etc. Ignorance, habits, perceptions, name and form, the six types of sensation, touch, feeling, grasping, birth, old age and death, sadness, pain, frustration and discontent form a self-perpetuating circle of causes and effects. The reality of those facts of life is accepted by everyone. The cycle of factors, each conditioning the other as effect and cause, presupposes that there are real combinations [such as bodies and minds].
>
> Śaṃkara replies:
>
> You are only talking about the originating causes of the elements in the series and overlooking the sort of organisational causality that would account for the formation of combinations. The latter is impossible if there are only momentary atoms and no subjects of experience. Perhaps the factors beginning with ignorance are the causes of the formation of aggregates. But how can they cause that which is the necessary condition of their existence?
>
> Moreover, you do not think that the combinations are formed in the interests of enduring conscious subjects so that they might experience the fruits of their *karma* (*bhogārtham*). Hence, experience is just for the sake of experience and is not sought by anything or anyone else. So freedom from rebirth (*mokṣa*) is just for the sake of itself and there is no one by whom it is sought. A being with an

> interest in both experiencing the fruits of action and gaining freedom from rebirth would have to exist contemporaneously with those processes and such persistence would conflict with your belief in the instantaneity of beings (*kṣaṇikatva*).

So while there may be a relation of originative causality between the members of the series, this does not suffice to explain their organized combinations. Śaṃkara continues to establish the stronger claim that the Buddhist position cannot even make sense of originative causality between members of the series. He begins by arguing that a strictly instantaneous reality does not last for long enough to bring about the existence of anything else.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.2.20

> The theory that realities are instantaneous implies that when the later moment originates, the earlier one no longer exists. So it is not possible to establish the relation of cause and effect between the two occasions. The claim that once the prior moment is fully actualised it becomes the cause of the later one is not intelligible because the hypothesis that a fully actualised entity has a causal function (*vyāpāra*) means that it is connected to another moment [so it is not strictly an instantaneous occurrence but an extended one].
>
> Nor does it make sense to say that the causal function simply is the existence of the prior entity. This is because origin of an effect that is not tinged by the own-nature (*svabhāva*) of its cause is impossible. If one accepts that the effect is tinged by the own-nature of its cause, the nature of the cause continues in the effect and that entails the abandonment of the hypothesis of instantaneity. Nor can it be argued that there could be a cause-effect relation without the nature of the cause affecting the effect because if that were applied in all cases there would be chaos.
>
> Moreover, what you understand as simultaneous 'origin and cessation' would be either the same as the proper form of an entity, or two phases of its existence, or something else. If they are the same as the proper form, the words 'origin and cessation' and 'entity' would be synonymous. If the terms 'origin' and 'cessation' mean two phases that are the beginning and end of an entity whose existence is what occurs between them, the acceptance of instantaneity of the entity would be overthrown because it would be connected with three phases – beginning, middle and end.
>
> If origin and cessation are quite other than the entity, it would follow that the entity is everlasting.

The theory of the essential temporality of beings (*kṣaṇikatva*) extends to human personality which the Buddhists understand as just a series of causally related experiential phases. There is no persisting principle of identity or

soul that is a further fact over and above the stream. Śaṃkara challenges the intelligibility of this proposal:

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.2.25

> Moreover the nihilist (*Vaināśika* – literally the believer in the spontaneous destructibility of all entities) accepting the instantaneity of everything must apply instantaneity to the subject of experiences. But that is not possible because of the phenomenon first personal memory [of the form, 'I remember that I did that']. Such memory is produced by the reoccurrence of an experiential awareness and it is only possible if the one who remembers is the same as the original subject. One man does not remember the awareness of another. How could there be the experience of the awareness, 'I saw that and am seeing it now' if there were no single subject seeing the earlier and the later? We all know that the experience of recognition occurs only when there is a single subject of both seeing and remembering. . . . The nihilist knows himself to be the one subject of seeing and remembering whenever he thinks, 'I saw that'. He does not deny that the past perception belongs to him any more than he denies that fire is hot and light.
>
> Since one and the same agent is connected with the two moments of seeing and remembering, the nihilist must give up his acceptance of the essential temporality of beings.
>
> If he recognises that all his past and future experiences belong to one and the same subject, and accepts that there is sometimes synthetic awareness of both successive and simultaneous cognitions, how can the nihilist who asserts universal instantaneity maintain his position?
>
> The Buddhist may say that recognition and synthetic awareness derive from the similarity of the momentary cognitions [and this generates the misapprehension that there are persisting object and the illusion that there is an enduring self]. But similarity is a relation between two different things. Someone who says that although there is no single perceiver of two similar things, synthetic awareness is based on similarity is talking nonsense. If he admits that there is a single perceiver of the similarity between the earlier and later moments, he thereby grants that there is one thing enduring through two moments and this contradicts the hypothesis of instantaneity.
>
> When a universally accepted reality is denied by philosophers, whatever they may say in support of their own view or in finding fault in that of others, they convince neither themselves nor others. When it is know that something is such and such, it must be expressed accordingly. Their thesis about similarity fails to accord with the facts of experience. The act of recognition is an understanding about one and the same thing and not of something that is similar to something else. It may be that sometimes there is a doubt about whether an external object is the same one

or something similar to it. But there is no room for doubt about whether the perceiving subject is identical to itself or just something similar.

Śaṃkara now turns his critical attention to the Buddhist 'consciousness-only' theory that reductively identifies what are usually taken to be extra-mental realities with elements of awareness. Of the various ingredients of the cosmic process posited by the Buddhist schools, they say that only the mental ones are real.

Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya 2.2.28:

The Buddhist *pūrva-pakṣin*: the Enlightened One taught the theory that the external world really exists in consideration of those followers who were convinced about the reality of things external to minds. But this was not his own belief, which was that amongst the five constituents of personal existence (*skandhas*), only perceptions were real. According to the '*vijñāna-vāda*', we can make sense of everything to do with means of, objects and results of knowing if they are purely internal to minds. Even if there were external objects, the process of knowing would not get under way without mind. But how is it known that this entire process is internal and that there are no objects independent of perceptions? Because there cannot be external objects. If external objects are accepted, they would be atoms or combinations of atoms, such as pillars. But atoms are not discerned in our awareness of pillars etc because they cannot be represented in consciousness. External objects cannot be combinations of atoms because we cannot determine whether they are the same as or different from the atoms. Moreover, although cognitions share the same nature in that they are just consciousness, they may express different objects. This would not happen unless the differentia were internal to awareness, so it must be accepted that a cognition has the same form as its object (*viṣaya-sārūpya*). Once this is granted, given that the representation of the object is determined by cognition (and not the other way round), the postulation of external objects is superfluous. Moreover, given that the object and the awareness of it always occur simultaneously (*sahopalambha-niyamād*), it follows that there is no difference between a cognition and its object. It is not that the case that where the cognition and its object are concerned, there is apprehension of the one when there is non-apprehension of the other. This would not make sense if the two were different in nature – in which case there would be nothing to stop the one occurring without the other. Hence there are no objects external to the mind.

Perception of objects is comparable to dreams. Just as ideas in dreams manifest the form of the apprehender and the apprehended although there are no external objects, so in the waking state one must understand that representations of solid objects occur without external objects. This is because from the point of view of felt experience, there is no difference between the forms of awareness.

Now if there are no objects external to minds, how is the variety of representations (*pratyaya-vaicitrya*) explained? It is explained by the variety of residual impressions (*vāsanā-vaicitrya*) left by previous ideas. In the beginningless series of births, an impression causes a perception which in turn leaves an impression and so on. This explains the variety of representations. Moreover, we understand by reasoning from positive and negative concomitance that the variety of cognitions is just caused by residual impressions. We both admit that in dreams and hallucinations, the variety of cognitions is caused by residual impressions in the absence of external objects. But we do not accept that there can ever be any variety of cognitions without residual impressions. Hence there are no objects external to awareness.

Śaṃkara now replies:

It is impossible to make sense of the non-existence of external objects because they are perceived. External objects, corresponding to representations (*prati-pratyayam*), are perceived. It cannot be the case that what is being perceived does not exist.

The Buddhist may claim, 'I do not say that I am not aware of objects. What I do say is that I am not aware of any object apart from perception.' But objects independent of perception must be accepted simply because of the nature of perception itself. No one perceiving a pillar or a wall is just conscious of his perception. But everyone perceives pillars and walls precisely in so far as they are the objects of perceptions. Even those who deny the reality of external things implicitly grant their existence when they say that representations internal to consciousness (*antar-jñeya-rūpam*) appear *as if* external. If we accept that reality is as it is given in direct experience, it is logical to accept that it is precisely the external that is manifested in consciousness, but not what is *like* the external.

The Buddhist argues that the 'external-like' is what is manifest because of the impossibility of external objects. This can't be right because what is possible and what is impossible is ascertained by the means of knowing (*pramāṇa*) and the means of knowing do not depend upon independently arrived at ideas of what we might imagine to be possible and impossible. What is possible and what not is understood by the use of some means of knowing. External objects are apprehended as they are in themselves by all the means of knowing. How can it be said that they are not possible on the basis of specious argumentation, given that they are perceived. And it is not the case that there are no external objects because of the conformity between cognitions and objects. If there were no objects, conformity between the representation of the object in awareness and the external object would be impossible. And the object is represented as external. That is why the co-occurrence of thought and object (*sahopalambha-niyama*) is due to the fact that a relation of mode of presentation and object – presented obtains between thought and object. It does not derive from the identity of thoughts and objects.

Moreover, consciousness remains the same although conditioned by different objects, such as a pot and a cloth. This is parallel to seeing a black cow and a

white cow. The individuals differ in respect of their colours but the generic property cowness is constant and immutable. The distinct identity of the one constant factor is established in comparison with the two and the distinct identities of the two are established in comparison with the single factor. Hence, thought and objects are distinct.

Moreover, two successive but discrete thoughts with a thinker, self-contained and confined to their own instantaneous occurrences, cannot be related as the apprehending factor and the apprehended. It follows that all the Buddhist teachings are lost because they involve inter-related ideas.

Maṇḍana Miśra

Śaṃkara's contemporary Maṇḍana Miśra is the other founding father of the monistic Vedanta vision. His *Brahma-Siddhi* was as influential as Śaṃkara's commentaries. Vacaspati Miśra attempted to reconcile the outlooks of the two thinkers in his *Bhamatī* commentary on Śaṃkara's *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya*.

Maṇḍana differs from Śaṃkara in seeing positive value in religious practices. He thinks that Vedic rituals are purificatory and predispose one to the realization of one's true identity. He has no quarrel with the path of world-renunciation (*saṃnyāsa*) but observes that it is difficult. He thinks that the enlightenment received from scriptural statements about the truth of non-duality must be intensified by ritual and contemplation in order to counteract still forceful residual traces of ignorance.

Śaṃkara's inspiration is *selfless* contemplative experience, which shows that tranquil consciousness is the self-revealing and self-establishing true nature of reality. For Śaṃkara, the fact that awareness occurs as the same in all cognitions shows that it is the basic reality. In pure consciousness there is neither differentiation nor individuality. This is called the Brahman, where consciousness and Being coincide. Experience of differences between knowers, thoughts and objectivity are fabricated through misunderstanding. Maṇḍana's position is somewhat different. It is what Paul Hacker called a 'radical ontologism'. Put simply, Maṇḍana does not put so much weight on considerations about the nature of consciousness as Śaṃkara. If we say that Śaṃkara's vision arose from looking within, then we may say that Maṇḍana's began from looking outside. There is something there, whatever it may be. The foundational scriptural text here is the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad's* 'In the beginning this world was just being, *one* without a second' (Ch.Up.6.2.1). Being (*sattā*) presents itself universally. Being is present everywhere. Not *being something*, just *being*. Being is not differentiated. Primary awareness, non-discursive and pre-reflective, reveals this

non-predicative being. Being is apprehended prior to the identification of objects in respect of their general and specific features. Being is the core identity of entities when we abstract away their properties and relations. Everything is experienced as sharing the undifferentiated form of Being that is always the same everywhere. Hence we have a monism of Being, rather than one of consciousness. The Brahman is already known in immediate experience, even though we inhabit the sphere of *avidyā* (misunderstanding), having lost sight of the true nature of Reality.

It is difficult to capture exactly what 'Being' means other than to say that it is the foundational reality of beings. It is that which is the unconditioned condition of there being anything at all. Maṇḍana also says what it is not. For example, it is more than actual and concrete entities that exercise causal efficacy, which Dharmakīrti treats as the criterion of reality. Moreover, it is not the susceptibility for being connected with some means of knowing or mode of evidence (*pramāṇa*). Such an epistemic account of being would restrict *what is* to what can in principle be known or identified. Maṇḍana's view is that Being transcends knowability. The conception is richer than that expressed by the existential 'is' that we use to assert that some entity is numbered among the objects that furnish our world ('There is a table here'). It is certainly stronger than Frege's suggestion that affirmations of existence are just denials that the number zero applies to some concept. It is also more than is captured by the 'is' of predication, which we use to say that something is such and such ('The table is black'). Finally, Being is not *an* entity because it does not belong to a kind.

The Being of beings is the *Brahman*, that which is unconditioned by particular features. It is known as such from the *advaita-śrutis*, which also teach the unreality of diversity. But if scripture is a means of knowing a non-dual reality, it is in conflict with everyday perception that apprehends differentiated entities. Maṇḍana denies that there is a conflict: perception apprehends pure being. The rationale for the denial that difference and individuality are basic realities and for the claim that perception does not grasp difference is extensively elaborated in arguments that will be developed by later Advaitins, especially Vimuktātman [fl. 950 A.D.] and Śrī Harṣa [fl.1150 A.D.]. We shall briefly mention a few points here.

Perception identifies the proper form of an entity: it refers to the thing just as it is in itself. Separating it from other things comes next. We cannot differentiate unless we have identified something in the first place. If differentiation or exclusion (*apoha*) were the nature and function of perception when we discern a particular entity, we would perceive the difference of the object

from everything else whether or not present in space and time. This is manifestly impossible and contrary to experience. Difference from other things cannot be the very nature (*svabhāva*) of an entity. Difference is relational. If it is constitutive of the nature of an entity, it follows that the entity is the same as that from which it differs. But if difference is not of the nature of entities, they are not essentially different.

Another consideration is that if difference is the very nature of entities, given that it is a form of mutual absence or non-existence (*anyonya-abhāva* – one thing's not being another – a reciprocal absence of natures), it follows that entities do not exist.

It is objected that Maṇḍana is treating difference as a real feature of entities, when it is a best a boundary. Difference is not a thing in its own right; it is not a mode of being of an entity but is only falsely presented by constructive cognitions (*vikalpa*). There is no property 'being different' that belongs to entities because difference does not really exist – an imagined nature does not really belong to an entity. Maṇḍana responds that this is exactly what he is saying: difference does not really exist but is projected by beginningless *avidyā*. He also considers the alternative that difference means the interdependence of entities and not their natures. A proper form is unitary but entities differ with respect to each other. Maṇḍana denies that interdependence is a genuine property of entities (i.e. a property whose loss or gain means a real change in a thing) by which they are constituted. It is illogical to hold that the continuing existence of entities depends on other entities when their natures are constituted by their own specific causes. Interdependence is a human concept and not something that belongs to things as they are in themselves.

After Dignāga, it became a standard view among Brahminical philosophers that there are two varieties of perception: non-conceptual and conceptual. The former is reception of whatever is given: the latter is the explicit identification of features, both general and specific. As Kumārila put it:

> In the first place here is cognition (*jñāna*) that is just seeing (*ālocanā*) and it is free from concepts (*nirvikalpaka*). It is produced from the pure entity and is like the cognitions of infants and the mute. Neither general (*sāmānya*) nor specific features (*viśeṣa*) figure explicitly in the content of awareness, but the individual that is their substrate is grasped . . . A subsequent cognition by which an entity is grasped in terms of its properties such as its universal and its qualities is *also* considered a form of perception.

Maṇḍana denies that there can be two varieties of perception. Perception is a means of knowing that just refers to Being. Every perception reveals the general form of being that is the Brahman.

His position is:

> Initially there is non-conceptual perception whose sphere is just Being (*vastu-mātra*). It is the ensuing conceptual cognitions that comprehend particularities.

What Maṇḍana means is simply that in the first instance we just register the presence of something really there. (If reality is basically simple, features of entities such as universal property, qualities and the relations between them are just products of conceptual superimposition.) Judgements that involve conceptual or constructive cognition come next. But that is not perception as a means of knowing. Indeed it is not *knowing* at all.

The rationale is: perception is a means of knowing. What are called non-conceptual and conceptual perception are different functions with completely different kinds of objects. The one refers to undifferentiated pure being, the other to particularities. He has shown that differentiation is not genuinely real, so cognitions of particularities must be false. They are cases of *avidyā*. *Avidyā* here means error or misconception *(vibhrama*). Error must be about something. There can be no apprehension of the non-existent. So constructive cognitions must be misunderstandings about pure Being. *Avidyā* is not genuinely real – if it were it could never be eliminated – but it is not totally unreal in that it is a familiar phenomenon. That is why it is called 'illusion'.

We beings are alienated from Being. This is *avidyā*. *Avidyā* is responsible for all plurality of individual selves, cognitions and objects, and the concomitant process of rebirth. It is also connected with sorrow, delusion and passions. It conceals one's true nature; instead creating the illusion that one is an individual agent subject to ritual and social duties and transmigration. While later Advaitins will distinguish between subjective *avidyā* that affects individuals and *avidyā* as a positive cosmic force that projects diversity and conceals the true nature of the *Brahman*, Maṇḍana, like Śaṃkara makes more modest claims. He says that *avidyā* belongs to individual selves. This is one of the reasons why the subsequent tradition will posit a causative *avidyā*. Something has to constitute the individual as an individual in the first place if it is to be the substrate of *avidyā*.

The development of the tradition

The early Advaitins attribute the illusion of multiplicity to beginningless *avidyā*. The epithet 'beginningless' means that we cannot explain its occurrence. But it also encouraged the thought that *avidyā* is some sort of effectual reality in its own right. Arguments about *avidyā* led to the development establishment of two schools of thought. One is called the Bhāmatī school after Vācaspati Miśra's commentary of the *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*. They say that the individual soul is the locus of *avidyā*. It distinguishes a fundamental causal *avidyā* from everyday mistakes and ignorance. *Avidyā* has two powers: it conceals the truth and it projects the illusion of diversity. What is called the Vivaraṇa school follows Prakāśātman's commentary on Padmapāda's *Pañcapādikā*. Padmapāda (700–750 A.D.) said that *avidyā* is the *cause* of all misconception (and superimposition), while Śaṃkara tends to treat them as the same. He described *avidya* as a material (*jaḍa*) force that is the underlying cause of the world-appearance. *Avidyā* veils the pristine nature of the *Brahman* and in association with the workings of *karma* and memory traces of previous cognitions produces the illusion of limited selfhood that is the substrate of individual experience and agency. He thought that the limited self is a finite reflection (*pratibimba*) of *Brahman*. This school says that the Brahman is both substrate and the object of beginningless *avidyā*, which is the substrative cause of plurality. *Avidyā* is an actual entity (*bhāva-rūpa*) that is the opposite to rather than just the absence of knowledge.

Further reading

Śaṃkara's *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya* is translated in Thibaut (1904). Mayeda (1979) translates the *Upadeśa-Sāhasrī* and has a useful introduction.

Suthren Hirst (2005) is highly recommended for Śaṃkara.

Potter (1981) has an introduction and summaries of works by Śaṃkara, as well as Maṇḍana's *Brahma-Siddhi* by Allen Thrasher. The latter's *Advaita of Vedānta of Brahma-Siddhi* is stimulating, as are Ram-Prasad (2001 and 2002).

Halbfass (1995) collects important articles by Paul Hacker.

Suryanarayana Sastri (1971) translates a classic of Advaita epistemology and metaphysics. It is a pity that he repeatedly translates '*vṛtti*' (mental function) as 'psychosis'.

Some aspects of the debates between the Advaitins and theists about scriptural exegesis are described in Bartley, *Theology of Rāmānuja* (2002).

The Summary of the Text in Acharya (2006) is useful for later Advaita.

See Granoff (1978) for Śrī Harṣa.

For Bhartṛhari, see John Brough's classic essays on 'Theories of General Linguistics in the Sanskrit Grammarians' and 'Some Indian Theories of Meaning' in Hara and Wright (1996). Also Matilal (1991).

For Gauḍapāda, there is a text and translation in Karmarkar (1953). See King (1995), for connections with Buddhism.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. In what senses is Advaita subversive of mainstream orthodoxy? Does it represent the implicit rejection of Hindu dharma?
2. Is a notion of a *static* absolute principle compatible with our experience?

12 Viśiṣṭādvaita-Vedānta

Chapter Outline

The religious context

After about 700 A.D. we see the rise to predominance within Hinduism of the sort of personalist theism found in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Purāṇas*, accompanied by a decline in the religion in which the Vedic rituals are central. This is not to say that ritual practices disappear. Rather, they are assimilated to modes of practice that are more concerned with worship of a deity conceived personally whose grace or favour is accessible to those human beings who love to respond to him in love (*bhakti*). God is thought to be concerned with the destinies of finite beings. From this perspective, the cosmos is understood as creation for the sake of sentient beings rather than as a hierarchy of spheres of existence (*tattva*), through which souls may or may not progress as a natural process in accordance with *karma*, understood as an automatic mechanism. There develops theological concept of the soul and a notion of human beings

as essentially lovers, enjoyers and knowers of God. According to this mentality the individual is constituted by God and the meaning and fulfilment of its life is to be found in relationship to God.

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta is the doctrinal articulation of the theistic *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* religious tradition that still flourishes in Tamil Nādu. It is a pluralist ontology and epistemological direct realism about a complex universe whose basic constituents are kinds of property-bearing enduring substances. The term '*Viśiṣṭādvaita*', frequently mistranslated as 'qualified non-dualism', is held by the tradition to mean 'the integral unity of complex reality'. *Vedānta* is the systematic hermeneutic of the *Upaniṣads*, the brief summaries of the teachings of the latter in the *Brahma-Sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

The *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* tradition developed in interaction with the enthusiastic devotion (*bhakti*) towards a personally conceived deity found in the hymns of the Tamil *Ālvārs*, the temple and domestic rituals and theology of the Tantric (i.e. non-Vedic) *Pāñcarātra Āgamas*, and a reflective Vaiṣṇava *smārta* orthodoxy. The latter found expression in the philosophical theologies of Nāthamuni (980–1050 A.D.), Yāmuna (c. 1050–1125 A.D.) and Rāmānuja (c. 1100–1170 A.D.). The latter was a creative genius who, adopting ideas from Yāmuna and an earlier commentator on the *Brahma-sūtras* called Bodhāyana, synthesized ideas current in the tradition into a realistic and pluralistic philosophical and theological system.

Influential *Viśiṣṭādvaitins* and their works include:

Nāthamuni (980–1050): *Nyāyatattva* (known only from quotations).
Yāmuna (1050–1125): *ātmasiddhi, Īśvarasiddhi, Saṃvitsiddhi; āgamaprāmāṇyam* (on the validity of the Pañcarātra cult and its scriptures).
Rāmānuja (1100–1170): *Śrī Bhāṣya* (commentary on the *Brahma-sūtras*), *Vedārthasaṃgraha* (précis of the former); *Bhagavadgītā-bhāṣya*.
Paraśara Bhaṭṭa (1170–1240): *Tattvaratnākara* (quotations from Vedānta Deśika).
Vedavyāsa (Sudarśanasuri) (1120–1300): *śrutaprakāśikā* (commentary on *śrī Bhāṣya*), *Tātparydīpikā* (commentary on *Vedārthasaṃgraha*).
Vedānta Deśika (Veṅkaṭanātha) (1270–1350): *Tattvamuktākalāpa*, *Sarvārthasiddhi*, *Nyāyapariśuddhi*, *Nyāyasiddhāñjana*, *Tātparyacandrikā* (commentary on Rāmānuja's *Gītābhāṣya*), Tattvaṭīkā (commentary on *śrī Bhāṣya*), *Pāñcarātrarakṣā*.
Śrīnivāsadāsa (1600–1650): *Yatīndramatadīpikā*.

Where the formation of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava tradition is concerned we have to reckon with a confluence of various trends and factors. There is the intense ecstatic devotional religion of the Tamil *Ālvār* poets, who thought of all

devotees equally as servants of God. They model the soul's relationship with God upon that between human lovers, and sing of the agony of separation and the bliss of reunion. The theologians, at least in their prose works in which they were concerned to demonstrate the concordance of their beliefs and practices with the normative religion of social and religious duty (*varṇāśramadharma*) that respects distinctions of caste, tended to suppress the ecstatic emotionalism and incipient social inclusivism of the *Ālvār* tradition. Nevertheless, they belonged to a monotheistic devotional milieu in which one is encouraged to delight in the awareness that one exists to be a servant of the divinity *Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa*. God is a person, a being with will, agency and purposes, upon whom one is radically dependent and in whom one may take refuge. God is a compassionate personal being who deserves praise and love. This entirely self-sufficient deity creates and sustains the cosmos for no purpose other than his own delight *(līlā)*. He is immanent both as the inner guide, the innermost constitutive element in people, (*antar-yāmin*) and as present in the consecrated temple icon. The reconciliation of mainstream orthodoxy and devotionalism is seen in the soteriologies of Yāmuna and Rāmānuja when they say that performance of the duties appropriate to one's caste and stage of life informed by understanding of the natures of the individual and highest selves combined with ritual worship and devotion invites the grace of the supreme person [*Vedārthasaṃgraha* 3]. In the first verse of his *Summary of the Meaning of the Gītā* (q.v. van Buitenen (1953), Yāmuna says that *Nārāyaṇa* who is the supreme Brahman is only accessible by devotion (*bhakti*) accomplishable by the observance of one's social and religious duty, knowledge and dispassion. *Bhakti* is not just a matter of feeling. It accords with the belief that if God is the foundational cause of everything, everything one does is also an action of God. This does not mean that one's free actions do not flow from the will. It means that it is thanks to God that the dependent soul is an *entity* in the first place.

A further factor constitutive of the *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* tradition is the non-Vedic or Tantric *Pañcarātra* system of theology and ritual informing the liturgies enacted in South Indian *Śrī Vaiṣṇava* temples. This tradition is probably as old as the Christian era, but it is unlikely that any of the surviving texts were composed before c. 850 A.D.

Pañcarātra sees the world as a real creation by a personally conceived divinity. It emphasizes divine immanence and accessibility in the temple icon. It understands people as individual souls. In his *Āgama Prāmāṇyam*, Yāmuna defends against attacks from *Smārtas* the orthodoxy of *Bhāgavata Brahmins* or *Sātvatas* who perform Pāñcarātra temple rituals. Some of these who belong to

the *Vājasaneyaśākhā* of the white *Yajur Veda* are of unimpeachable Brahmin status. There are others, who claim adherence to the *Ekāyanasākhā* and identify the *Pāñcarātra tantras* as the fifth Veda (the Vedas are held to be infinite in extent), but Yāmuna sees their activities as on a par with those of *Smārtas*. Suffice it to say that Rāmānuja accepts the epistemic authority (*prāmāṇya*) of the *Pāñcarātra-Bhāgavata* teaching, rejecting the claim that it is opposed to *śruti* in that those *tantras* teach that the individual self has a beginning. He denies that the system teaches this. Rāmānuja interprets the *Pauṣkara Saṃhitā* as teaching that the Supreme Brahman, called *Vāsudeva*, out of kindness to his devotees continuously wills to exist in modes such as the temple-icons so as to make himself accessible to those resorting to him. The *Pāñcarātra* teaching was composed by God and conforms to that of the Vedas, understanding of which it facilitates. The system teaches the nature of *Nārāyaṇa* and the proper way of worshipping him.

Finally, there is a lineage of learned *Vaiṣṇava* teachers (*ācārya*) specializing in *Upaniṣadic* exegesis and adept in sophisticated *śāstric* traditions, *Smārta* Brahmins who take refuge in *Viṣṇu* as their patron deity (*iṣṭa-devatā*). Nāthamuni, Yāmuna, Rāmānuja and their successors belong to this tradition of realistic and pluralistic interpretations of the Scriptures instead of the monism found there by the mystic renouncers of the Advaita tradition.

Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta represents a renewal of an ancient tradition of realistic exegesis of the *Upaniṣads*. Rāmānuja's sophisticated theological formulation of the bhakti religion in opposition to the world-renunciatory Advaitic gnostic tradition was not new. He cites [*Vedārthasaṃgraha* 92–93] a long list of earlier teachers belonging to the Vedāntic tradition of *Upaniṣadic* exegesis who taught that *bhakti* alone, expressed in action and involving profound understanding, is the path to god.

But Advaitic monism flourished after the seminal works of Maṇḍana Miśra and Śaṃkara (fl.c. 700 A.D.). They hold that ordinary experience articulating a plurality of individual conscious and non-conscious entities is a beginning-less global misconception (*anādi-avidyā*) superimposed upon an inactive and undifferentiated Brahman characterized as non-intentional pure consciousness. On this view, the liberation of the soul from rebirth is simply the cessation of ignorance about the true nature of reality. It is the intuitive realization that one's true identity (*ātman*) is non-intentional awareness (*jñapti-mātra*) and that one is not an individual agent subject to ritual duties and transmigration. This outlook is obviously at odds with the *Bhedābheda* tradition of *Upaniṣadic* exegesis, which sees the real cosmos as an emanation (*pariṇāma*) of the

Absolute and as the real self-differentiation of the Supreme Soul – the substrative cause of all existents. The basic *Viśiṣṭādvaitin* doctrine that the actual, real world of conscious and unconscious entities is an organic complex that is both essentially dependent upon God, and intrinsically distinct from him belongs to this realistic tradition of thought.

Knowing God only from Scripture

Like all Vedāntins, Rāmānuja assumes that the truth about God can only be known from the timeless Vedic scriptures, primarily the Upaniṣads, the knowledge-portion (*jñāna-kāṇḍa*) of the Vedas. Although only scriptural language, and not perception and inferences based upon it, can reveal the truth about the transcendent, Rāmānuja does say [*Śrī Bhāṣya*1.1.2] that we have natural knowledge of God as that which possesses unsurpassable greatness, since this is the meaning of the verbal root *bṛh* from which the term 'Brahman' is derived. Unsurpassable greatness includes powers such as omniscience and omnipotence that are properties of that which is both the material and efficient causes of the cosmos. Further content may be added to this concept by texts such as *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1. 'The Brahman is reality, consciousness, infinite', which he interprets as implying three distinct properties belonging to the divinity, (in contradistinction to the Advaitins who think that the predicates serve merely to differentiate the Brahman from all else).

Only the Scriptures, and not human reason, can reveal anything about the nature and existence of God. Rāmānuja [*Śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.3] uses philosophical argument to show that argument cannot prove the existence of God. He adduces a number of considerations against the standard inferences for the existence of God, all of which rely on the general principle (*vyāpti*) that products require an intelligent maker with the appropriate capabilities. For example, although we can infer a producer from human artefacts, we have no knowledge of the ultimate origination of natural features such as mountains and oceans and their existence supplies no reason to suppose that they have one all-powerful and all-knowing maker. The philosophical inferences cite as examples the production by potters of objects such as pots that are unequivocally single whole entities. But can we really treat the cosmos as a whole as a single great big object? The complex world consists of many different types of effects and as such cannot license the inference of a single maker. Assuming that the universe can be treated as a single product, was it made at one time

or at different times? We have neither observational nor purely conceptual grounds for supposing that it was made at one time. But if it is made at different times, it is also possible that it has more than one maker. In our experience agents, however capable, are finite and embodied. All our everyday valid inferences about who produced what concern finite and embodied makers. The Brahman is different in kind from everything else. Thus we cannot infer that it is an agent in the sense in which we understand agency.

Opposition to Advaita

The Advaitic concepts of the Absolute as impersonal, static, consciousness and of the non-individual soul (identical with that Absolute principle) as utterly transcendental and detached from personal individuality are the fruits of the mystic renouncer's contemplative experience in whose light the everyday world appears as less than fully real. But these visionary insights are problematic when it comes to explaining the genesis of the finite universe and its relation to the unconditioned reality that has nothing in common with the world. The developed Advaita tradition attributes the plural universe and our experience thereof to the operation of a positive force (*bhāva-rūpa*) called *Avidyā* (as the substrative cause of the cosmos, it is obviously different from everyday notions of ignorance and misconception) which projects diversity and conceals pure being. The undifferentiated pure conscious reality falsely appears as the plural world when it is obscured by *avidyā*. *Avidyā* explains why we unenlightened beings mistakenly but inevitably think in terms of different individual entities. Causative *avidyā*, and its product, the cosmos, are indeterminable or inexpressible (*anirvacanīya*) as either real or unreal. The Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition rejects the latter claim as incoherent: if something is not real, it is unreal. If it is not unreal, it is real. If it is neither real nor unreal, it is both real and unreal. If *avidyā* is different from the Brahman, monism is compromised. If it is the same as the Brahman then it exists either absolutely or never. They insist that ignorance cannot be a subsistent entity with causal efficacy. It is just the absence of knowledge. Moreover, the putative causal ignorance must have a substrate. It cannot be the Brahman, which is pure knowledge. Nor can it be the individual self which, according to Advaita, is itself the product of ignorance. Also, since the scriptures, in common with all the *pramāṇas*, belong to the sphere of *avidyā*, their capacity to reveal the truth is undermined.

The Advaitic proposition that reality is unitary and undifferentiated quickly attracted the objection that there is no means of establishing its truth *(pramāṇa)*. There is already an instance of difference if the operation of the means of knowledge presupposes a duality of act and object. Rāmānuja argues that we cannot make sense of the notion that there is any sort of reality, ultimate or otherwise, that is undifferentiated and non-intentional consciousness (*nirviśeṣa-cinmātra*). He is an epistemological direct realist, holding that all cognitions are intrinsically valid (*svataḥ-prāmāṇyam*) just in virtue of their occurrence. He holds that intrinsically reflexive consciousness is always *about* something. In addition, apprehension is always of the real (*sat-khyāti*): all perceptual cognition, even when misleading (*bhrama*), is in accordance with what is the case (*yathārtha*) independently of our thinking. There are no intrinsically false cognitions. Ultra-realism involves minimizing or explaining away what are ordinarily viewed as perceptual errors and hallucinations. There is an ancient theory that all material things are compounded out of the same elements. When mother of pearl is mistaken for silver, we are actually detecting traces of silver in the mother of pearl. Cognitions are intrinsically formless (*nirākāra*) and assume the forms of their objects. The lack of subjective contribution eliminates perceptual distortion. It is the extra-mental environment, consisting of stable objects that endure through space and time, that is responsible for mental variety. Truth is correspondence, understood in a strong sense as structural isomorphism, between knowing and the known. The subject-object structure of cognition is held to be self-evident and encoded in normal language. There simply are no cognitionslacking an agent and external object.

Implicit in Rāmānuja's critique of the Advaitic idea that authentic reality is featureless and non-intentional consciousness is an appeal to a principle upheld by the Indian realist traditions: whatever is, is knowable and nameable. All the means of knowledge refer to entities having properties. The notion of an object without properties is unintelligible because thought and language are possible only with respect to entities identifiable by their specific characteristics (*viśeṣa*). The language of the Scriptures, like all language, is composite and relational, and its complexity mirrors that of its objects. This is a crucial point. Scripture is our only means of knowing about the transcendent. If its language is complex and language is isomorphic with what is expresses, complexity must obtain at the ultimate level.

He continues with the argument that sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*), whether non-conceptual (*nirvikalpa*) or conceptual (*savikalpa*) cannot establish the

existence of a non-differentiated reality. We have seen that thinkers of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Mīmāṃsaka traditions tried to distinguish the two types of perception in various ways. The problem is difficult: to what extent can non-conceptual perception lack specificity while still referring to something? Is it possible to apprehend a 'bare particular' devoid of specific and generic features? Following Maṇḍana Miśra, Advaitin thinkers appeal to the example of non-conceptual perception in arguing that there can be pure uninterpreted experience that is the same as 'pure being' or featureless reality. The Viśiṣṭādvaitins reject the mainstream view upheld by Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsakas that *nirvikalpaka* perception grasps a bare reality (*vastu-mātra*) without reference to features such as names, quality, substance and generic property. Rāmānuja says that the content of *savikalpa-pratyakṣa* (conceptual perception) is complex since it explicitly refers to that which is qualified by several categorial features (*padārtha*: i.e. *jāti*, *guṇa*, *dravya* and *kriyā*). But the object of non-conceptual perception (*nirvikalpa*) is also complex since such a prior sensational state is a condition for the comparison of already experienced differentiated entities at the subsequent conceptual stage. Non-classificatory perception is the apprehension of an entity as lacking some differentia, but not of every differentiating feature since apprehension of the latter kind is never encountered and is in any case impossible. Every cognition arises in virtue of some differentia and is specifically verbalized in the form, 'this is such and such a kind of thing'. The difference lies in the fact that in non-conceptual perception a complex entity, analysable in terms of the categories of substance, specific and generic properties, is cognized, but what is missing is knowledge of the recurrence (*anuvṛtti*) of those features in other entities of the same kind. In *nirvikalpa-pratyakṣa* we cognize an individual and its concrete generic structure (*jāti*, construed as *ākṛti* or *saṃsthāna*) as distinct. But since the structure has been seen in but one individual we cannot generalize and form a concept. The key point is that since non-classificatory perception is complex and since there is a structural isomorphism between knowing and the known, it cannot yield knowledge of an undifferentiated reality. Finally, inference (*anumāna*) relies upon perceptual data and is thus incapable of revealing featureless reality.

The individual self

The Advaitins think that the soul or one's true identity (*ātman*) is inactive, impersonal consciousness without any content because it is identical with

the Brahman. Everyday self-experience is a mirage, concealing the unconditioned being. But devotional theism requires that the self is an individual thinking, acting and feeling entity, capable of responding to God. Advaitins and Viśiṣṭādvaitins attach quite different meanings to the term '*ātman*'. Viśiṣṭādvaita maintains that we really are individual selves, enduring substantial entities that are really distinct from the bodies that they can objectify, having experiences while not being reducible to streams of experiences. Each soul has its own ineffable identity that is known only to itself. Every subject of experience enjoys a sense of 'mineness' that is not the same as the individuality of the physically, psychologically and socially constituted person. It is this feeling that individuates the souls, whatever their circumstances. The soul is a permanent principle of identity that underpins the synthetic unity of experience in the present and through time.

Viśiṣṭādvaitins think that agency, which requires some form of embodiment, is always an accidental and not an essential feature whether the soul is bound or released. Nevertheless, embodied agency is a reality, not a misconception. The Viśiṣṭādvaitin philosophers propound defences of commonsense realism about the self as a persisting centre of reflexive awareness that is in contact with mind-independent realities. Embodiment is crucial in that it enables agency and sorts of experience that exhaust the accumulated *karma* of souls in bondage to rebirth. The tradition does not understand *karma* as an automatic mechanism. Rather it is an expression of the will of God. It is a perfectly just mechanism, rewarding and punishing souls for their actions. It is *karma* that contracts the soul's intrinsically unlimited consciousness when we misidentify ourselves with our embodied status that is a product of *karma*.

The Viśiṣṭādvaitins agree with the Advaitins that consciousness is unique in that it does not require anything else to establish its existence (*svataḥ siddha*). But they differ from them in denying that the true self may be understood simply as consciousness. Were that the case, selves could not be individuals. Rather, reflexive and intentional consciousness is an essential *property* of individual selves that are its agent and substrate. It is the true self that is incorrigibly revealed as the 'I' in every conscious state. Our everyday sense of selfhood is not a mistake concealing another authentic 'inner self'. Thoughts are properties that require an enduring thinking subject. That consideration is used by the Naiyāyikas as an inference for the existence of a persisting subject. But Rāmānuja and his tradition think that such an inference is superfluous because but we are immediately aware of ourselves as individual persisting identities whose essential property is consciousness. Everyone always knows

who they are. The conscious subject is always a specific mental presence. The self is not known in the same ways as objects and states of affairs in the world are known because it is phenomenally given in direct intuition.

The Self is the agent of conscious acts that illuminate objects. Conscious acts are both intentional and reflexive. The tradition defines consciousness in terms of two factors: its intentionality – its being directed towards objects other than itself – and its reflexivity or 'self-awareness'. They hold that all conscious states are intentional: they are acts on the part of a subject directed towards some object or state of affairs. But Rāmānuja resists the externalist view that experience is necessarily and not just causally dependent upon interactions with an objective environment by insisting that all conscious acts and states are always self-illuminating or intrinsically reflexive (*svayaṃ prakāśa*). That is to say, when a subject cognizes something, *simultaneously and in virtue of the same act*, he is aware of himself as cognizing that reality. Even in intentional cognitive acts that are, as it were, absorbed in the object by being fully attentive to it there is also an element of subjective awareness.

We have seen that the Viśiṣṭādvaitins rule out the possibility of non-intentional blank awareness (*nirviśeṣa-cinmātra*). Awareness is always complex and always about something. Moreover, consciousness is in a state of flux. Were it identical with the self, it would be impossible to recognize something seen today as the same thing seen the previous day. The self is not a bundle of fleeting experiences. It is the persisting subject that has the experiences – a principle of continuity with a witness' perspective upon the states that it co-ordinates. The normal self keeps track of itself through time. It is the agent of mental acts and its permanence as such and the momentary nature of those acts are both directly perceived. Distinctively Viśiṣṭādvaitin is the idea that the self both has the form of consciousness (*cid-rūpa*) and has consciousness as its quality. They say that consciousness is both substance (*dravya*) and an attribute (*guṇa*) and its nature is to render entities susceptible of thought speech and action. As the essential property (*svarūpa-nirūpaṇa-dharma*) of the soul, it can be considered as substance, but as discrete mental acts possessed by the self, it exists as an attribute.

The Advaitic tradition says that one's everyday feeling of personal identity (*ahaṃkāra*), the sense of oneself as an individual agent subject to religious and social duties and confronting a world of objects, is a mask concealing the identity of consciousness with the impersonal, inactive Absolute beyond differentiation. The illusion occurs when the light of consciousness is confused with the activity of the material intellect (*buddhi*). As we saw above,

Rāmānuja's tradition denies that our everyday feeling of continuous personal identity is an illusion or a case of mistaken identity. It is integral to theistic bhakti that the self that understands itself as a servant and lover of God should be the authentic self. The 'I' that thinks, intends and acts is the real self. The pronoun 'I' ultimately stands for the inner self that is itself ensouled by God, its inner guide and sustainer. As Nāthamuni puts it in the Nyāya-tattva, 'If "I" did not refer to the true self, there would be no interiority belonging to the soul. The interior is distinguished from the exterior by the concept "I". The aspiration, "May I, having abandoned all suffering, participate freely in infinite bliss", actuates a person whose goal is liberation to study scripture etc. Were it thought that liberation involved the destruction of the individual, he would run away as soon as the subject of liberation was suggested . . . The "I", the knowing subject, is the inner self.'

The soul-body model

Rāmānuja's basic ontology is a threefold hierarchy of three really distinct categories: the personal God Nārāyaṇa who is the first cause and sovereign of the cosmos, also immanent in the individual souls; individual souls that are the subjects of experience; physical bodies occupying the material environment that are the objects of experience. Rāmānuja's basic conception, and most significant contribution to the tradition, derived from *śruti* passages such as *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.7.3–23 (e.g. 14: 'This soul of yours who is present within but is different from all beings, whom all beings do not know, whose body is all beings, and who controls all beings from within – he is the Inner Controller, the immortal one') is that the cosmos of souls and matter is the body of God (*śarīra-śarīrī-bhāva*). This is not intended as merely one possible interpretation among others, one provisional model, a useful way of thinking about God and the world. It is thoroughly Vedically based. It is what the Upaniṣads, the sole source of Vedāntic theology, teach. While the development of this idea is due to Rāmānuja, it was already present in his tradition. For example, the final verses of *Yāmuna's Īśvarasiddhi* say, 'The universe obeys the will of one person because it is insentient, like a body. All conscious entities function under the governance of one, like touch, because functioning depends upon connection with a body. The universe has one person as its source because he animates conscious and non-conscious entities, like a country with one king'.

The relationship between God and the world is parallel to that between an individual self and its body. The key features are essential dependence and difference. He defines a body as any substance (*dravya*) that a conscious entity can control and support entirely for its own purposes and whose *raison d'être* is to be an ancillary (*śeṣa*) to that entity. All conscious (*cit*) and non-conscious (*acit*) entities are the body of the Supreme Person since they are controlled and supported by him exclusively for his own purposes and their *raison d'être* is to be his ancillaries. The relation between soul and body is that between ontic ground (*ādhāra*) and dependent entity (*ādheya*) that cannot exist separately, between controller and thing controlled, between master and servant. The 'body' term is an essentially dependent mode (*prakāra*) incapable of existing separately (*apṛthak-siddhi*). Souls and matter may exist potentially (the Brahman's causal state) or actually (the Brahman's effected state). In either case they are ensouled by God and cannot exist independently of him because they are internally controlled by God and constitute his body. By being present in the individual selves, God is present in matter. It is only because souls and material objects are ensouled by God that they are *entities*. Just as a parcel of matter only becomes a body when animated by a soul, so the souls are entities only because immanent divinity sustains them.

Rāmānuja accepts the *satkāryavāda* theory of causation according to which effects exist potentially in their causal substrata prior to their actualization as entities with determinate name and form. An effect is a different state of the substrative cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of which it is a transformation (*pariṇāma)*. It is not a completely different substance. The Brahman is the material and efficient cause of the cosmos, which is a single, organic and intelligible process. There is an *analogia entis*, a continuity of being, between God and the world. Rāmānuja interprets Upaniṣadic principle that 'by knowledge of the one, there is knowledge of the whole' as meaning that by understanding the nature of a substrative cause one understands the nature of its effects. Understanding the scriptural statements about the Brahman is the key to understanding the world.

It is God, 'one without a second' who is the substrative cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*) of the cosmos and not an independent principle such as the *pradhāna* of the Sāṃkhyas or the real *māyā* of the Śaiva Siddhāntins. God may be considered as both cause and effect: cause when *cit* and *acit* entities are in their latent condition, and effect when they have evolved and acquired names and forms. Cause and effect are ontologically continuous. The manifest cosmos is a real transformation (*pariṇāma*) in which the real three categories of God souls and matter maintain their distinct identities.

'Since everything forms the body of the Supreme Person, he is directly signified by every word.' Rāmānuja has a semantic principle that the signification of essentially dependent modal entities (e.g. bodies) extends to the mode possessor. Whenever something is essentially in an attributive relation to something else (this includes the relations between qualities, generic properties (*sāmānya*, *ākṛti*) and the individual substances (*dravya*) to which they belong as well as that between souls and bodies), the terms for the attributes may also signify the possessor. God has created the expressive power (*vācaka-śakti*) of words together with the entities which they signify. Any self is a mode of the Brahman since it is included in the Brahman's body. Human bodies are modes of their souls. Words for bodies signify in their primary senses both the conscious entities ensouling them and God qua the inner controller and guide (*antar-yāmin*) of the self. Thus God's immanence as the soul of each embodied soul is the basis of the literal reference of scriptural language to Him.

As we saw above (Chapter 10) thinkers of the Bhedābhedavāda tradition such as Bhāskara and Yādava Prakāśa (1050–1125: originally an Advaitin, then Rāmānuja's teacher) formulated versions of pantheism according to which the cosmos of souls and matter emanates from God. This was repugnant to Rāmānuja's tradition. According to the Bhedābhedavāda, the Brahman is the all-encompassing category of being of which all entities are instances – the emanations are actually instantiations of God. Their Absolute is originally undifferentiated being, void of qualities, actions, kinds and individualities, but becomes threefold as subjects of experience, objects and the controller. The cosmos is its substrative cause in conditioned form. Effects are not really different from their material causes and the world is non-different from the Brahman. The individual self is but the Brahman affected by ignorance (*avidyā*), *karma* and desires (*kāma*). Rāmānuja's objection is that this view converts the Unconditioned into finite reality, subject to transmigration, imperfection and suffering. One reason for developing the 'three-level ontology' in which the Brahman, souls and matter are essentially distinct is to avoid the undesirable consequence that the Absolute is implicated in the vicissitudes of finite existence. Thus he replaced the *Brahma-pariṇāma* theory with the idea that real transformation occurs only in the sphere of the entities that constitute Brahman's body (*brahma-śarīra-pariṇāma*). He goes beyond an emanative model of cosmic production by distinguishing between divine primary causality in constituting the cosmos of souls and matter, and the operation of secondary causes in the created realms. The Brahman is essentially distinct from its dependent modes: its essential being or proper form abides intact.

It is in the field of scriptural exegesis that the soul-body model comes into its own. The interpretation of co-referential (*samānādhikaraṇa*) statements such as '*Tat tvam asi*' ('That thou art' expressing a relation between the self and the Brahman) and '*Satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ Brahma*' ('The Brahman is reality, consciousness, infinite': *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1.1) is central to Vedāntic theology. *Samānādhikaraṇa* means the co-occurrence of two or more items, for example an individual substance and its property, in the same locus or substrate. In grammatical usage, it is 'the reference to a single object by several terms having different grounds for their application'. Such constructions appear in scriptures expressing the relationship between God and the world, God and the self or, in the case of '*Satyaṃ jñānam anantaṃ Brahma*' as saying something about the divine nature.

Vedāntins believe that the language of revealed *śruti* is our only means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) about transcendent reality. We have no cognitive access to God independently of the infallible and authorless scriptural authorities. Rāmānuja is a realist holding that there is an isomorphism between knowledge and the known. There is also a structural isomorphism between scriptural statements and the reality of which they speak. It is not just the meanings of words that are informative. Grammatical constructions reflect the nature of reality. There is a sense in which a thinker's theory of meaning determines their metaphysics. Advaitins emphasize the singularity of reference and construe co-referential constructions as identity-statements conveying an impartite essence (*akhaṇḍārtha*). This usually involves attributing non-literal senses (*lakṣaṇā-artha*) to the co-ordinated words, and this is recognized as an exegetical weakness. Rāmānuja's tradition maintains that the grounds for the application are differences belonging to what is signified. Co-referentiality is thus the reference to a complex reality by words expressing its different features. Rāmānuja says that it expresses a single entity qualified by its essentially dependent modes. He interprets co-referential statements about God and features of creation as expressive of the soul-body relation. In the case of '*Tat tvam asi*' ('That thou art') the Advaitins attribute an extraordinary sense to each term: 'that' stands for the impersonal Absolute, and 'thou', has to be purged of its everyday connotations of individual personality so that it may signify the Inner Self that is identical with the Brahman. The statement expresses the identity of the two. But according to the Viśiṣṭādvaita exegesis, the 'that' stands for the creator God, the inner guide of the soul, of whom all entities are modes since they form his body. 'Thou' stands for an individual self, an essentially dependent mode of God. '*Tat*' denotes the Highest Self,

which is the cause of the universe, whose purposes are ever-actualized (*satya-saṃkalpa*), who possesses every exalted quality and who is devoid of every trace of imperfection. '*Tvam*' denotes the same Brahman embodied by the individual self, along with the body of the latter. The grammatical co-ordination conveys the unity (not identity) of the two. The co-referential terms apply in their primary senses.

The soul-body model enables Rāmānuja to interpret many scriptural statements that had been treated as favourable to Advaitic monism in a theistic way.

Here are some relevant passages from Rāmānuja's works:

> Because the body is a mode of the embodied entity and because the meanings of words for modes extends to the mode-possessor, there is the principle that the meanings of words signifying bodies extend to what is embodied. Whenever we think, 'This is such and such', the mode is understood as the aspect that is 'such and such'. It is logical that the mode culminates in the mode-possessor since it depends upon that entity and its being apprehended depends upon that entity. Thus a word signifying a mode extends to the possessor. (*śrī Bhāṣya* 1.1.13)
>
> Because all conscious and non-conscious entities are modes of the Supreme Soul in that they are his body, all words for such beings apply in their primary senses to the Supreme Soul. (*Vedārthasaṃgraha* 75)
>
> People unlearned in Vedānta do not see that all objects and all individual souls participate in the nature of the Brahman. They think that the referential scope of all words is restricted to the entities that they usually signify that are in fact only part of their meanings. Once they have learned about the Vedānta passages, they understand that all words signify the Brahman who constitutes his various modes since everything participates in the Brahman in so far as he is the Inner Controller and that everything is created by him. (ibid. 21)
>
> The body may be thought of in co-ordination with the Self in that it is the essential nature of bodies to exist in an attributive relation with selves since they would not exist independently of them. This is comparable to the relation between generic properties such as cowness and their individual instances. (*Gītā Bhāṣya* 13.1)
>
> We have interpreted the manifold scriptural statements consistently with each other and without sacrificing their literal senses. The Scriptures saying that the Brahman does not change retain their primary senses by rejecting transformations of its essential nature. The Scripture saying that it is without qualities are established as denying undesirable ones. Denials of diversity are preserved because they assert that the Brahman has everything as its modes in that he is the soul of all because all conscious and non-conscious things are entities only because they are embodied modes of the one Brahman. Pass ages saying that the Lord is

different from his modes and has all perfections may be taken at their face value. Statements that he is pure consciousness and bliss are taken literally because they convey a self-luminous reality having blissful awareness as an essential property. Statements of unity are well established because the co-referential constructions in their primary senses express a soul-body relation.

Is the overall purport of the Upaniṣads difference or non-difference or difference-cum-non-difference? It is all three. Non-difference is established because the one Brahman has everything as its modes because he is embodied by everything. Difference-cum-non-difference (*bhedābheda*) is established because the *one* Brahman exists as multiplicity having conscious and non-conscious entities as his modes. Difference is established because non-conscious entities, conscious entities and the Lord differ in respect of their essential natures and activities and are not intermingled. (*Vedārthasaṃgraha* 84–85)

Further reading

The *Śrī Bhāṣya* is translated in Thibaut (1904), the *Vedārthasaṃgraha* in van Buitenen (1956) and the commentary on the *Gītā* has an English précis in van Buitenen (1953).

Svāmī Ādidevānanda's edition and translation of the *Yatīndramatadīpikā* is useful primary source.

There is a classic monograph by Carman (1974), which can be supplemented by Lipner (1986). Bartley (2002) sees the soul-body model as an exegetical device and dwells on controversies with Advaitin interpretations.

For God as the 'inner-controller' see Oberhammer (1998).

For the devotional religious context see Hardy (1983).

For Pañcarātra, Schrader (1973) is still the standard work. There is interesting material in Sanderson (2001). See also Sanjukta Gupta (2000), *Lakṣmī Tantra*.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Does Rāmānuja have a pantheistic *vision* of the world as the body of God, or is the notion better understood as an exegetical device?
2. Why is he so opposed to Advaita?
3. Does he have a basically *theological* concept of the self?

13 Dvaita-Vedānta and Madhva

Chapter Outline

Dvaita is a realist form of metaphysical pluralism. It is the philosophical articulation of radical *Vaiṣṇava* monotheism. Madhva and his followers insist that the Scriptures are first and foremost revelations from and about the one god called *Viṣṇu*. Madhva's thinking is theocentric, rather than anthropocentric or cosmocentric, to a remarkable degree. Anything that we may know about God, we learn from the Scriptures. There can be no natural knowledge of God. The tradition extends the canon of Scripture beyond the revealed *śrutis* and traditional *smṛtis* that are accepted by all Vedāntins to include many specifically Vaiṣṇava sectarian compositions, many of which appear to be very late compositions.

Madhva lived in Udīpi in Karnataka from 1238 to 1317 A.D. and wrote commentaries on several *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Brahma-Sūtras* and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, in addition to many compositions of his own such as the *Viṣṇutattvavinirṇaya*. Other exponents of Dvaita-Vedānta are the acute logicians Jayatīrtha (1365–88) and Vyāsatīrtha (1460–1539), both of whom commented on Madhva's works.

Basic to their ontology is the distinction between the only independent and self-determining (*svatantra*) reality that is the unsurpassably great godhead,

and the dependent sentient and insentient existences whose very being is sustained by God. The universe is real creation but it has no intrinsic tendency to continue in existence. The world only continues in existence beginninglessly and perpetually because it is *always* known and sustained by God. *Viṣṇu* is omnipotent, omniscient and blissful. Indeed he is possessed of the host of glorious characteristics elaborated in the *Pāñcarātra* scriptures. All his attributes are eternal and in no wise different from him. He is different from all other beings, but this difference does not affect him. There is no plurality in the divine nature parallel to that of the world. There are no differences intrinsic to the divine nature, which is simple. God's uniqueness consists in there being no difference between his essence and his existence. In other words, it is his essence to exist, whereas the existences of finite beings are dependent.

The cosmos is structured by five types of real difference: the difference between God and the individual soul, that between material objects and God, differences between individual souls, difference between individual souls and material objects and differences between material objects. Souls and matter are eternal realities. So the notion of divine creation should be understood as an articulation of a relation of absolute dependence rather than as a process of emanation from the divine substance.

The cosmos is real and has no beginning. If it has a beginning it would perish. But it does not perish, and it is not constructed by mistaken thinking (*na bhrānti-kalpita*). Were it thus constructed, it would cease. But is does not cease. Only the mistaken could say that duality does not exist! The wise know that the plural world is real because it is known and protected by Viṣṇu. There are many individual selves and the complex physical world exists independently of consciousness. An attitude of commonsense direct realism pervades his work. The basic principle is that in direct acquaintance (*anubhava*) with environment that we inhabit, our minds are not creative and constructive. We are confronted by a world outside us, before our minds get to work. He calls this primary, pre-reflective and pre-discursive experience 'pure knowing' (*kevala-pramāṇa*). Truth is correspondence between a judgment and an objective state of affairs. Correspondence here should be taken in the strong sense of congruence or conformity, rather than just the sort correlation that we find between a map and a territory. He says that knowing (*pramāṇa*) is ascertainment (*niścaya*) that conforms to its object (*yathārthyam*). The word '*pramāṇa*' can be analysed as having two senses: a state or piece of knowledge (*pramiti* or *pramā*); and an instrument of knowing – an intentional act by which the real nature of an entity is ascertained or measured. Quite consistently with his

direct realist (anti-representationalist) epistemological stance Madhva departs from the mainstream tradition in acknowledging that memory is a genuine epistemic authority. He says that memory is produced by internal perception (*mānasa-pratyakṣa*). It is *pramāṇa* because it reports a stored informational state (*anubhava*) that conforms to reality (*yathārtha*). Memory is *pramāṇa* when it is correct cognition that is faithful to an object or state of affairs that has already been known and that has not been annulled by a correcting cognition – as in the case of veridical perception.

Madhva's Vedanta is not only opposed to non-dualism, which denies the reality of difference and maintains that the Absolute and the soul are identical, but also to other theistic forms of Vedānta such as *Viśiṣṭādvaita*. The latter posits links between God and the world of conscious and non-conscious entities. He thinks that his compromises God's transcendent perfection. He disagrees with the Viśiṣṭādvaitin view that there is a continuity of being (*analogia entis*) between God and finite existences. Conceiving of the relation between God and the world in terms of a model such as that between soul and body is a form of anthropomorphism. It posits too close a parallelism between the divine and human orders of being.

Each entity is a unique individual (*viśeṣa*). This individuality is directly and non-discursively intuited (*anubhavād jñāyate*). The unique individuality of an entity has to be known before we can apply words and concepts to it. This is crucial: on this account entities are not constituted, constructed or individuated by our thoughts. We immediately know entities, and ourselves, in their uniqueness without having to compare them with anything else. The notion of *viśeṣa* eliminates the problem of explaining how released souls lacking personal individuality are distinguished from one another. There are three categories of souls: those who are liberated; possible candidates for liberation; those who are beyond salvation (those who explicitly reject the sovereignty of *Viṣṇu*).

Liberation, in which the soul retains its essential individuality, consists in the realization of a state of innate consciousness and bliss focused on the divinity and is unattainable without a combination of intense devotion (*bhakti*) and divine favour (*prasāda*). Only *Viṣṇu* saves: liberation is not a human achievement. Love follows acceptance of the unique sovereignty of the Creator and Sustainer, and the understanding of the fivefold difference that characterizes the cosmos in contrast to the absence of internal differentiation in God.

Madhva departed from mainstream *Vedānta* in denying that God is the material or substrative cause of the world. God is only the efficient cause or creator in that he actuates an independent material principle that is subject to his governance. He creates by organizing an independent material principle

that is subject to his governance. The gulf between the absolute and the finite is spanned by the divine will that sustains and supports finite beings.

Madhva's doctrines are attractively and succinctly presented in a work called the *Viṣṇu Tattva Vinirṇaya*, extracts from which we shall now look at:

> If we say that there is no text without an author (*apauruṣeya*) the notions of right (*dharma*) and wrong and the other matters of which the scriptures speak that are accepted by all philosophical traditions lack any foundation. Someone who denies right and wrong does not help the world and only encourages violence. There is no point in his trying to serve mankind since he admits no supernatural reality.
>
> Right and wrong cannot be established by human opinions because people are liable to ignorance and dishonesty.
>
> That the Vedas are not human compositions is self-evident because there is no tradition testifying to their authorship. Positing an author when one is not known is an uneconomical hypothesis.
>
> The epistemic authority (*prāmāṇyam*) of the Veda is intrinsic. Otherwise there is the problem of an infinite regress.
>
> Modes of knowing (*pramāṇa*) like perception and inference have no epistemic authority independently of scripture in matters such as what is right and wrong because the latter are out of their range.
>
> The Vedas are eternal and subsist in the mind of Viṣṇu. They are manifested, but not originated, when uttered by God.
>
> The Vedas are fact-asserting. They speak of already existing things as well as things to be done. In ordinary language, meanings are primarily grasped in respect of things that already exist. Language is primarily informative and descriptive. It is only once one has understood that something is a means to an end that one acts accordingly.
>
> The overall purport of scripture is not the identity of the individual soul and God.
>
> Passages stating that they are different are not uninformative repetitions of what is already known by some other means because the existence of God is not established without scripture.
>
> God's existence cannot be proved by inference because inference can also prove the opposite.
>
> The argument, 'The world must have a creator because it is an effect, like a jar' is countered by 'The world has no creator because it is not a single whole object'.
>
> If the reality of difference is established by perception and inference within whose province it falls, scriptures asserting non-difference must be false because they are contradicted by those means of knowing.
>
> Even if scripture is stronger than perception in some contexts, it cannot be valid when it conflicts with it.

Self-evident experience establishes the difference between the individual soul and God. Everyone knows that they cannot do everything. Scripture is not an authority if it contradicts this sort of self-evidence.

If difference is established by a means of knowing other than scripture, it is self-evident that it cannot be denied.

If it is not so established, scriptures teaching difference will still be authorities because they inform us about something that would otherwise be unknown.

As non-difference is contradicted by all the means of knowing it is not the purport of scripture. Rather, the purport of scripture is the unsurpassable greatness of Viṣṇu.

The goals of human life such as *dharma* have results that are ultimately transitory and mixed with unhappiness (since one knows that they won't last for ever). Only freedom from rebirth (*mokṣa*) is the supreme felicity to be sought by those wandering in *saṃsāra*.

Freedom is not attained without the grace of God. God feels affection for those who recognise his superior virtues but not for those who insist on their identity with him.

Difference

The logical arguments against the reality of difference advanced by Advaitin thinkers are unsound because difference is the proper form or essential nature (*svarūpa*) of an entity.

Examples of such arguments are:

There is proof of difference by the existence of the relation between attribute and substrate or quality and qualified. But relation between attribute and substrate depends upon difference.

Knowledge of difference depends upon cognition of the counterparts to the subject. But the cognition of those counterparts depends upon cognition of the subject from which they differ.

These arguments are circular and lead us to conclude that we since cannot properly formulate an understanding of difference it does not exist.

Madhva replies: But just because difference implies that there are counterparts to the subject, it does not follow that it is not the proper form of the subject. That number one is not the number two does not compromise its identity.

Difference is established whenever a proper form of an entity is identified. We see the proper form of an entity as unique and other than everything else. The expression, 'the difference of this' is parallel to the expression, 'the proper form of the entity'.

If the proper form is not also the difference, the difference of the entity from all others would not be known when the entity is seen. If such individuality is not already known, it would be possible to doubt whether one's self is not a jar.

Having cognised individuality and the general difference of the entity from everything else, one might sometimes question whether the entity is in fact the same as something else that it resembles. But one never doubts whether one is the same person.

Cognition of a universal like potness occurs only once the identity of an object has been cognised. Entities must be unique to begin with. They are not made individual by their properties or modes because they must be distinct identities in the first place if they are to acquire different features.

Individual identity is directly intuited.

When we say that something is different from a pot and that something is different from a cloth, the 'being different' is not the same in both cases.

The hypothesis that individual entities cognised by the means of knowing are unreal (*mithyā*) is an obfuscation since it contradicts the means of knowing.

Reasoning (*tarka*) on its own cannot refute what has been established by the means of knowing. What is directly perceived cannot be dismissed as error just by reasoning.

We move on to the rejection of the Advaitin theory that just as illusions and mistakes cannot be categorised as real (because subsequently corrected) or unreal (because they have real effects) neither can the plural cosmos be real or unreal because it is a product of *avidyā*.

[143] There is no means of knowing something that is neither real nor unreal.

When someone says, 'We cannot be aware of what does not exist' is he thinking about non-existence or not? If he is not thinking about non-existence, he cannot deny that non-existence was a real content of thought. If he is thinking about non-existence, the same applies.

Without a concept of non-existence, the difference of something from the non-existent cannot be known. When we mistake a piece of shell for a piece of silver, it is not the case that the silver is neither existent nor non-existent because the corrective experience is, 'Non-existent silver appeared there'. We cannot say that it was objectively real just because it was experienced. Illusion means thinking that something unreal is real or thinking that something real is unreal.

In illusions there is a thought of something real that was not present in a certain set of circumstances.

We do not need to claim that the content of illusions is neither real nor unreal. Introducing that category introduces more problems than it solves. For instance, it is real or not? The idea flies in the face of experience. Everyone thinks in terms of things either existing or not existing.

Sections 160–308 provide dualistic and theistic interpretations of scriptural passages to which Advaitins appeal as the foundations of their position. He says that we cannot rationally reject the difference between the individual soul and the Brahman when it is taught by many scriptures. The Advaitin distinguishes between scriptures teaching the truth of non-duality and the rest whose authority is secondary. Madhva points out that this amounts to saying that some scriptures are false. So why should we accept that the ones teaching identity are true? We have no way of evaluating scripture apart from scripture. The purport of the scriptures is the unsurpassable greatness of Viṣṇu. It cannot be the identity of the individual and the Brahman when this is contradicted by every means of knowing. Such identity is contrary to experience. No one thinks, 'I am omniscient' or 'I am the Lord of all' or 'I am free from sorrow' or 'I am perfect'.

Chāndogya Upaniṣad 6.8.7 says: 'That which is the subtle essence, that is the identity of the cosmos, that (*tat*) is the reality, that is the *ātman*, and that (*tat*) is what you are' (*Sa ya eṣo'ṇimaitadātmyaṃ idaṃ sarvam. Tat satyam. Sa ātmā. Tat tvam asi*).

Advaita Vedāntins read 'That thou art' as an identity statement. Rāmānuja understood it as expressing the relation of inseparable dependence between body and soul, and between the soul and God. Madhva reads it as 'You are not that'. He contrives this by ignoring the natural break between '*ātmā*' and '*Tat tvam asi*' so that it becomes '*ātmātat tvam asi*' which is analysable as '*ātmā atat tvam asi*'. According to the rules of Sanskrit morphology, the long **ā** *may* indicate the coalition of an initial letter **a** with the letter **ā** at the end of the preceding word. The form '*atat*' means 'not that'.

Sections 309–362 are devoted to a critique of a form of subjective idealism which reduces to solipsism. As he puts it, 'There is no way of proving that the whole cosmos is a figment of the imagination of a single soul'.

The word '*prapañca*' is a common expression for the plural cosmos. Madhva analyses it by the *nirukta* method and finds that it means the five kinds of differences. '*Pañca*' means five and '*pra*' abbreviates '*prakṛṣṭa*' meaning expansion. Because this *prapañca* is called '*māyā-mātram*' it cannot be unreal. What does he mean? *Māyā*, he says, means God's consciousness. That which is known (*māna*) and preserved (*trāṇa*) by God's consciousness is *māyā-mātram* (*mā* + *tra*). 'Since it is known and protected by God, the plural world is not fabricated by misconception.' 'There can be no perceptual error when one sees directly. Viṣṇu knows everything directly. He sees the universe, so it cannot be unreal'.

Direct epistemological realism

> [343ff.] If the world is fabricated by misconception, there would be two worlds (one fabricated and another in which someone or something is doing the fabricating). There is no mistaking a piece of shell for silver unless there is real shell, real silver and similarity between the two. Even in dreams when traces of prior experiences are active, a world appears to the mind as existing externally. In cases like the conch seen as yellow and the sky as blue, the subject is related to the properties yellow and blue. They exist elsewhere although not concretely instantiated in those circumstances. There are no perceptual errors without two similar real entities. This is why it makes no sense to speak of the superimposition of what is not the self i.e. features of the world) on the self.
>
> There are further considerations in defence of realism in verses 389–395:
>
> The theory that something that is directly seen as real, is in fact unreal, needs the support of stronger evidence than observation. But if there is no such evidence, there is no need to suspect observation. What is known by perception cannot be refuted by reasoning alone without other more authoritative perceptions. We know on the basis of perception and reasoning that large objects appear small in the distance. This is not a perceptual error. We can understand that this is the way things appear to us. We can use perception to establish the scope of perception, but there could be no way of establishing that all our perceptions are false.

* * *

The trouble with *Avidyā*

The Dvaita philosophers present a battery of arguments against the various ways in which the Advaitin thinkers attempt to account for the appearance of the many when the truth is that Absolute Reality is single and unchanging. Advaita blames plurality and the ignorance on plurality on ignorance (*avidyā*). The theory that ignorance is a cosmic force inexplicably connected with the Brahman had become established as the canonical doctrine long before Madhva's time. The argument that if the plural universe were just a mistaken mental construction it would cease to exist whenever anyone understood that it was such recurs throughout his works. If the universe is but an ultimately unreal construct and *avidyā* is always associated with the *Brahman*, there is no genuine possibility of liberation.

Madhva applies the principle that illusions and cognitive errors only occur when there is some similarity between two things. But this cannot apply globally because there is no similarity between the *Brahman* and the cosmos.

The view of Maṇḍana Miśra and Vācaspati Miśra that *avidyā* belongs not to the *Brahman* but to the individual self can quickly be dismissed because the very concept of individuality is fabricated by misconception in the first place. Moreover, if the soul that has *avidyā* is really identical with the *Brahman*, then *avidyā* belongs to the *Brahman* too. Some Advaitins argue that the apparent difference between the soul and the *Brahman* derives from some sort of imagined feature or unreal qualification (*upādhi*) that becomes superimposed upon the Brahman. But this is unconvincing. If the *upādhi* is constructed (*kalpita*), this act presupposes ignorance in the first place, and the argument becomes circular: *avidyā* produces the *upādhi*, and the *upādhi* is responsible for ignorance. If the *upādhi* is not constructed and is a beginninglessly real feature of the individual soul, it follows that there is something that originally differentiates the individual soul from the *Brahman*. If the qualification really belonged to the *Brahman*, it would compromise its perfect simplicity.

The idea that the Brahman is the substrate of ignorance was intended to avoid these problems. But if this is true, the released soul will be subject to ignorance too since the Advaitins suppose it to be the same as the Brahman. If ignorance is somehow implicated in the very being of the Brahman, it must be real. If such ignorance is responsible for plurality, then plurality is real and it would be impossible to escape from ignorance-based *saṃsāra*.

Further reading

Sarma (2003) is a good start. It needs to be supplemented by Mesquita (2000). Gerow (1990) translates a text from the subsequent tradition and is excellent on the details of the controversies with Advaita. The *Viṣṇu-Tattva-Vinirṇaya* is in Raghavachar (1959) with a translation.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. Is Madhva right to think that Rāmānuja's soul-body model compromises God's perfection?
2. In what sense does he have a concept of God as a personal being?
3. Some people have suggested Christian influences. Do you detect any?
4. The Mādhvas were originally Śaiva Siddhāntins. Can you see any connections?

14 Tantra: Some *Śaiva* Philosophies of Kashmir

Chapter Outline

Between 700 and 1100 A.D. Kashmir was home to an extraordinarily rich and sophisticated religious and intellectual culture. Informed by their own scriptures (called Tantras or Āgamas), monistic and dualistic schools of Śaivism (the worship of forms of the deity Śiva, sometimes accompanied by his female partner or *Śakti*), and to a lesser extent some Vaiṣṇavas (votaries of the deity Viṣṇu), competed with Buddhism for the patronage of rulers and the adherence of the populace. We shall look at the ritualistic monotheism called Śaiva Siddhānta that understands the world as a real creation for the sake of individual conscious souls, and also at some of the monistic Śākta cults

worshipping forms of the Goddess and the fearsome god Bhairava. The latter follow scriptures that are quite separate from those of the Vedic tradition, and involve practices involving the violation of taboos as means of acquiring extraordinary powers, the expansion of consciousness beyond conventional inhibitions and the propitiation of antinomian deities. They think that freedom from rebirth is the recognition of one's true identity as nothing other than the dynamically conscious source of everything. Both Śaivas and Śāktas accept the authority of a corpus of twenty-eight divinely revealed scriptures called Āgamas or Tantras, but the Śāktas expanded the canon significantly and of course claim finality for their own scriptures.

Most Śaivas accept that the religious observances, gnostic and ritualistic, sanctioned by mainstream orthodox Brahminism can lead souls to contexts of experience in higher levels of the cosmos. Indeed, it is of those traditions that they claim to be superior versions. But they denied that orthodoxy was the path to the highest attainable good beyond the cosmos of worlds. The ultimate state is achievable only through the religious disciplines of the Śaiva cults.

Śaiva Siddhānta

This is a Tantric (i.e. non-Vedic) ritual cult teaching that there are three permanently distinct eternal categories of reality: the godhead named Śiva, individual conscious souls, and material and psychological realities. Its scriptural authorities are 28 texts called *Tantras* or *Āgamas* that are believed to be the word of God. It flourished in Kashmir between the eighth and the eleventh centuries A.D. Important thinkers belonging to this tradition include Sadyojyotis (c. 700 A.D.), Nārāyanakaṇṭha (925–975 A.D.), his son Rāmakaṇṭha (950–1000 A.D.) and Aghoraśiva (c. 1150 A.D.). Sadyojyotis wrote a work called 'The Examination of God and the Soul' (expounded by Rāmakaṇṭha as the *Nareśvara-parīkṣā-prakāśa* [NIPP]), a commentary on the *Svayaṃbhūva-āgama*, as well as a number of shorter works. Nārāyanakaṇṭha wrote a commentary on the *Mṛgendra Āgama*. Rāmakaṇṭha's most significant works, in addition to that just mentioned, include commentaries on the *Mataṅgapārameśvara Āgama* [MPAV] and the *Kiraṇa Tantra*.

Śaiva Siddhāntins believe that ritual worship of Śiva, consequent upon initiation into the religion (*dīkṣā*) through the imposition of mantras by one who has undergone a higher consecration (*ācārya*) and is held to be a human expression of the deity, is the only means to the human soul's liberation from rebirth at death. Initiation and liberation are entirely thanks to the descent of

Śiva's grace (*anugraha-śakti-pāta*). Only Śiva saves. Initiation removes some of the restrictions on the soul's potentially infinite innate powers of knowledge and agency. These, however, cannot be fully manifested in the context of human life. So initiation does not wholly destroy all the limiting factors proper to the human condition. The portion that remains is gradually eliminated over the course of one's life by the prescribed daily ritual and meditative observances. Following the prescribed religious path for its own sake prevents the production of personalizing *karma* that binds one to rebirth. The latent accumulated *karma* that would otherwise have generated further finite existences is wiped out in the initiation ritual.

The innate capacities for universal knowledge and agency of some souls have been suppressed by an innate defect called '*mala*'. *Mala* is also responsible for those souls' subjection to bondage by *karma* and rebirth. The concept of *mala* as a substantial and irreducible entity in its own right (*vastu*) is of cardinal importance for the Śaiva Siddhāntins because it explains why the souls undergo subjection to bondage or karmically bound experiences in the sphere of materiality in the first place. There has to be such a primal and irreducible defect obscuring the soul's dual faculty (*śakti*) of knowledge and action, because there is no other satisfactory explanation for the process of transmigration. Originally pure souls would not become involved in rebirth. (Rāmakaṇṭha discusses this in the sixth chapter of his commentary on the *Mataṅgapārameśvara-āgama* [MPAV p. 208 ff.] and in the second chapter of *Kiraṇatantra-vṛtti*.) This original stain, the root cause of bondage to rebirth, is categorized as a material substance (*dravya*) that attaches itself to souls. Knowledge would be sufficient for liberation if bondage to rebirth were just a misconception. Indeed, the monistic Śaivas identify it with ignorance and thus say that it can be removed by knowledge. But knowledge of the presence and nature of a material substance is insufficient for its removal. Such a substance can only be removed by action – specifically, the Śaiva Siddhānta initiation ritual (*dīkṣā*). *Mala* is like an ocular cataract, awareness of which does not prevent its efficacy. Its removal requires the action of the surgeon's instrument. When Śiva decides that a human soul, who longs for liberation from rebirth and accepts the Śaiva teachings, is morally fit for liberation, he induces that soul to approach an *ācārya* and solicit initiation. That ritual weakens *mala* and enables participation in Śaiva ritual life. The real nature of Śiva is revealed to the initiate for the sake of the manifestation of his power of cognition. Thus illuminated, he appears like Śiva and he becomes a Śiva at the death of the body.

Initiation leaves caste, understood as a physical property, intact. The Śaiva Siddhāntin is thus able to fulfil his Brahminical social and ritual duties.

His exacting life of Śaiva ritual duty is thus compatible with the observance of mainstream orthodox Brahminical duty and caste purity (*varṇa-āśrama-dharma*). The tradition holds that the daily and occasional obligatory rites must still be performed because there is still a danger of reverting to *saṃsāra* if they are omitted. Indeed, one should not transgress the practices of one's caste and station in life. (Some of the monistic Śaiva traditions say that there votaries are in everyday life Vedically orthodox (i.e. observant of *varṇa-āśrama-dharma*), in religion a Śaiva (i.e. a Śaiva-Siddhāntin), but in secret a Kaula (i.e. an initiate into an ecstatic visionary cult whose practices transgress the boundaries of conventional orthopraxy).)

So the Śaiva Siddhānta is primarily a religion of ritual from initiation until death. *Mala* obfuscates awareness that Śiva and the soul are equals (not, for example, master and servant). Initiation enables the realization of this truth. But it does not destroy every imperfection. Some *karma* (were it totally obliterated, the initiand would die) remains and one is still embodied and enmeshed in the impure cosmos. Post-initiation performance of ritual eliminates the residual imperfections. Such observances are not mindless and mechanical but an enlightened path of active gnosis or understanding-in-action. Knowledge is only effective when acted upon, and action presupposes understanding. Daily worship is preceded by a rite in which the practitioner imagines himself as Śiva, sanctifying himself by the imposition of *mantras* on his body and faculties, in accordance with the principle that only Śiva can worship Śiva. Initiation marks the start of a new way of life and the transformation of one's being. Liberation, occurring at death, is understood as equality with Śiva – meaning a state of qualitative identity in which the soul's innate capacities for knowledge and action are fully realized. (In order to avoid a clash of purposes, the released selves choose not to exercise their omnipotence.) In should be noted that the tenet that the capacity for *agency* is an essential property of the selves in all their conditions is one of the factors that demarcates the Tantric from those mainstream orthodox traditions that treat agency as ultimately either illusory or a function of embodiment.

The three categories: Pati, Paśu and Pāśa

Pati includes Śiva and released souls. The deity is the efficient (*nimitta-kāraṇam*), but not the substrative cause (*upādāna-kāraṇam*), of the universe's

cyclical emanation, stasis and reabsorption into its substrate. As well as the cosmogonic functions, the deity also has the powers (*śakti*) of concealment (*tirodhāna-śakti*) and grace (*anugraha-śakti*). The former is understood as the compassionate provision of environments in which finite beings may experience the fruits of their *karma*, thereby exhausting its potency, and in which they may work towards their salvation. Saving grace is primarily manifest in the initiation ritual. Śiva is the efficient cause in that he activates the real and beginningless substrative cause, called the *māyā-tattva*, out of which evolves the cosmos of inferior worlds. This differs from the view, characteristic of the Vedānta taught by Śaṃkara and Rāmānuja (but not Madhva), that the Supreme Being is the substrative as well as the efficient cause of the cosmos that emerges from the divine being. The Siddhāntins reject this on the grounds that the implicit ontological continuity between God as the material cause and the world as the arena of effects would implicate the totally transcendent divinity in the finite, imperfect and physical aspects of the cosmos.

The cosmos comes about so that finite beings may perform actions and experience of their results. The worlds, or spheres of experience, are organized in accordance with the accumulated *karma* of finite beings. World-production is a compassionate act for the sake of bound souls who need spheres of experience if they are to be freed from *karma* and *mala*. It follows that the cosmos is ultimately friendly to human beings. The world is shaped by and for human interests and there is the possibility for freedom and fulfilment of our highest aspirations.

While the existence of the supreme divinity is revealed by the Śaiva scriptures, Nārāyaṇakaṇṭha and Rāmakaṇṭha hold that it can also be proved by argument from effect to cause. The occurrence of an effect permits the inference of its causal factors (*sva-kārakam*). Just as fire is inferred from the observed presence of smoke, so the existence of God can be inferred from the exercise of his creative powers. We conclude that an object such as a pot has a maker because it is an effect or product. There is an invariable association (*vyāpti*) between something's being and effect and its having a maker, just as there is between smoke and fire. Effects require makers with the appropriate knowledge and power. The success of the causal inference for the existence of God depends upon accepting that the cosmos as an integral whole can be considered as an effect. The Mīmāṃsakas deny that the world is an effect because it does not have a beginning ('things have never been otherwise'). But Rāmakaṇṭha claims that the world must be an effect because it is complex (*saṃniveśa/sāvayava*) and composed of gross matter (*sthūla*). As such it cannot

be self-created but must have a maker with the knowledge and power appropriate to its complexity. Thus we establish the existence of God.

There is a specific challenge at this point from the Buddhist Dharmakīrti (600–660 A.D.) who argues that while we can infer in respect of specific cases of *composition* that each has a controlling agent, we cannot infer that all effects have a single maker. In other words, from the proposition, 'every effect has a cause' we cannot infer 'there is one cause of every effect'. Pots and mountains are both effects, but they are effects of different kinds. Rāmakaṇṭha thinks that this is a quibble that undermines inference: it is established that every sort of effect is invariably concomitant with some kind of maker ([Kiraṇatantra (Goodall) p. 72]).

But perhaps the world just emerges from the material elements. So why try to prove another cause called God that is absolutely unseen? Rāmakaṇṭha's reply is that a non-intelligent cause could not generate the regular and structured diversity that the world displays. Without super-natural governance the emergence of entities from matter would be chaotic. It is true that the world is organized in accordance with the good and bad *karma* of sentient beings. But *karma* is non-conscious, so such organization requires superintendence by a single deity with the requisite understanding of the diverse *karma* of beings.

Paśu

Bound souls that are individual centres of reflexive awareness and agency potentially capable of existing beyond space, time and the physical. Each has the essential properties of being a knower and being an agent. While potentially omniscient and omnipotent, some of them have become enmeshed in inferior physical and mental existences in the realm of *māyā* where their deliberate and intentional actions generate residues which personalize and remain with the agent until circumstances appropriate for their fruition occur (karma). Human souls are subject to *mala*, *māyā* and karma. Such souls are equipped with five derivatives from māyā that are called *kañcukas*:

1. A limited capacity for agency (*kalā-tattva*) bestowed upon souls who would otherwise be paralysed by *mala.*
2. A limited capacity for sensory perception and other intellectual acts (*vidyā-tattva*). Aghoraśiva says that '*vidyā* is the means by which one knows the intellect (*buddhi*) in its various aspects such as judgment, memory, imagination and concepts' (*Tattvasaṃgrahaṭika*, verse 13).

3. A principle of causal regularity (*niyati-tattva*) ensuring that the results of actions (*karma-phala*) accrue to the agent.
4. An interest in the objects of experience on the part of the otherwise apathetic *mala*-afflicted selves (*rāga-tattva*).
5. Our experience of time and its successiveness (*kāla-tattva*). Time is a created reality and plays no part in the lives of śiva and released souls.

Pāśa or bonds including *māyā*, karma, *mala* and Śiva's power of concealment. In addition to the five *kañcukas*, the products of *māyā* are prime matter (*prakṛti-tattva*) consisting of the three *guṇas* (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), intellect (*buddhi*), mind (*manas*), the sense of ego (*ahaṃkāra*), the five sense-faculties and the subtle forms of their objects, the organs of speech and movement, and earth, water, air, fire and space. The mental apparatus, being inert and material is not intrinsically conscious, but it may assume the form of awareness. Mental faculties are purely instrumental, helping bound souls to find their way around the world. Rāmakaṇṭha says that the instrument of knowing may be said to be conscious only metaphorically.

Rāmakaṇṭha on the enduring individual self and its experiences

Embodied human souls are self-conscious individual agents of knowing (*grāhaka*) endowed with a psychological apparatus. They are neither merely consciousness nor a just a stream of experiences. Their perceptual cognitions grasp mind-independent realities. We can distinguish between objects as known and objects existing mind-independently. Immediate experience, prior to any conceptualization that may lead to sceptical doubts tells us that the objects of awareness are external things that have effect upon us.

A Buddhist philosopher may argue that everything and everyone is really undifferentiated consciousness variously expressing itself. He may say that we do not apprehend any difference between the *forms of awareness* (*ākāra*) of objects and cognitions because they are always co-experienced. A Mādhyamika may argue for emptiness (*śūnyatā*): because there are no essences or intrinsic natures (*svabhāva*), everything is relative. There are no absolute truths apart from what humans may agree on and no possibility of an absolute conception of reality independent of particular human interpretations. Rāmakaṇṭha points out that either is going to need some means of substantiating his thesis.

Hence whatever we understand the world to be, that will have to become the object of some means of knowing (*pramāṇa*). There will thus be some sort of relation between the means of knowing and the objects known. That relation presupposes that there exists at least one kind of duality. Without a means of knowing he cannot establish emptiness. The world is *objectified* (*viṣayīkṛta*) whenever someone seeks to establish (*vyavasthāpāyitum* – identifying the nature of something and discriminating it from others) anything by a means of knowing. It is impossible to establish anything about that which has not been made an object. Because of the reality of the process of objectification, the world cannot be empty in the Madhyamaka Buddhist's sense. That is to say, there really are objective standards by which truths can be known.

Rāmakaṇṭha rejects the Buddhist idealist claim that there is non-apprehension (*anupalambha*) of the difference between the forms of objects and our cognitions of them. He says that this is contradicted by the fact that we recognize the difference between establisher and established. Were it otherwise, we could not establish anything. The Buddhist agrees that there are methods of establishing the nature of reality. But such methods cannot just be operating on themselves because there is a contradiction in something's performing its proper function on itself. Hence if there are such methods, they must have objects external to themselves [MPAV 154–155].

Let us remind ourselves at this point of the difference between the Buddhist idealists (*vijñaptimātra-vādins*) and the Buddhist representationalists (*Sautrāntikas*). The latter hold that there is a significant difference between the way things are and the ways our minds work. They say that we have to *infer* (*anumeya*) the real mind-independent domain (*bāhyārtha*) as the ultimate *cause* of the sorts of experiences that we have. But those experiences are always interpreted in our ideas. While there is an external domain consisting of instantaneous unique particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), it does not figure as such in the contents of our thoughts. By contrast, the idealist theory denies that there is a real domain independent of perceptions. Mental variety derives from the accumulation of mental traces laid down by prior perceptions. When Dharmakīrti says that there is no difference between the colour blue and the cognition of blue because they always co-occur, he did not intend the denial of the mind-independent domain. The argument recommends agnosticism about its nature: an agnosticism that should wean us away from our conventional mentality structured by the subject-object dichotomy. The point was, however, taken by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike to be an idealist thesis.

Dharmakīrti had said that, 'Although awareness is undifferentiated, it is considered by the misguided to be differentiated into objects, perceivers and thoughts.' This can be interpreted in two ways. If it means that in reality everything is internal to awareness, it is consistent with the idealist outlook. But it is also consistent with the Sautrāntika representationalist's anti-realism if it is taken as meaning that we naturally understand the world in terms of subjects, objects and experiences, although those categories do not mirror reality as it is in itself. Rāmakaṇṭha follows the idealist reading. The idealist will say that an experience of a pot is precisely that: just an experience. Believing in a world of mind-independent material objects is just such a matter of experience. But there is a problem here. Rāmakaṇṭha observes that two sorts of consciousness are pre-reflectively *given* in everyone's experience (*anubhava-siddham*): there is the awareness of oneself as the perceiving subject (*grāhaka*) and there is awareness of objects apprehended (*grāhya*). Also, from the phenomenological point of view, we do experience a difference between the sorts of awareness that we have of our cognitions on the one hand and of objects on the other. Moreover, the subject is given in its internality as the constant and uniform perceiver, but the contents of its awareness of objects known are always changing. So Dharmakīrti's claim that consciousness is uniform fails. Dharmakīrti thought that the notion of a constant subject was an illusion, a product of mental construction. But Rāmakaṇṭha points out that while all sorts of imagination and mental fabrications are possible, the basic identity of the subject cannot be a construct because it cannot exercise the process of conceptualization (*vikalpa*) on itself. The constructor can't originate itself as a result of its own constructive activity. It has to be there in the first place. Rāmakaṇṭha argues that the Buddhists cannot make sense of the notion of constructive superimposition (*vikalpa*) if everything is instantaneous. A momentary awareness is no sooner come than gone. If there is no temporal duration, there can be no mental synthesis of earlier and later. It follows that recognition, memory and conceptual construction, all of which require both duration and a single subject capable of uniting separate cognitions, are impossible [MPAV 159–160].

Rāmakaṇṭha argues for a conception of the self as an enduring principle of identity, whose essential properties are reflexively known consciousness and agency. The self is that which always reveals objects. It is established by its own self-awareness as the stable and continuous illuminator of objects. Embodied human souls inhabit a structured environment consisting of kinds of persisting objects that exist independently of minds. The world really is as it appears to

us. It is irrefutably given in pre-reflective experience that external things are the objects of awareness in that they are causally effective [MPAV 155–156].

To say that the self is an enduring substance is to treat it as an entity is not a property, state or feature of something else. It is numerically one and the same at different times. Although some of its accidental properties may change, it retains its essential character. Its fundamental stability does not preclude its being involved in time and matter through the process of embodiment. We may contrast this notion of substance with that of an event, which is a reality that has temporal parts or phases. Examples are plays and cricket matches, which are spread out in time. Substances and events can be conceived as persisting through time in two different ways, endurance and perdurance. Events *perdure* in virtue of their different phases, although no one part is present at more than on time. Substances *endure* by being wholly present throughout the course of their existence. This applies to the classical understanding of *ātman* and is stated explicitly by Śaṃkara. The *ātman* is involved in processes through the life of the body, mind, senses and public circumstances with which it is associated. Occurrences comprise the life-history of such a continuant and it makes sense to speak of phases of this history. But it is a mistake to suppose that such stages of the *ātman*'s history when embodied are also parts or stages of that which has the history. On this understanding, events in one's life are not parts of one's essential identity but parts of the life with which it is associated.

We have seen that Buddhist philosophers adhere to an ontology of processes and events (*nairātmya* – non-substantiality), rather than one in which enduring substances are the ultimate constituents of the worlds. They typically reduce whatever is conventionally considered as a stable substance to sequential occurrences: the human subject is an essentially temporal succession of phases.

Introducing his polemic against Buddhism (MPAV 150), Rāmakaṇṭha mentions four traditions of Buddhist thought:

> The Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas who accept the existence of entities external to the mind (*bāhyārthavāda*); the Mādhyamaka relativists who say that the constituents of reality postulated by the *bāhyārthavādins* lack intrinsic identities (*svabhāva-śūnyatā*); and the Yogācārins who hold that everything is dependent upon minds.
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> They all agree that there is no entity called 'soul' which is distinct from transient cognitions, because we have no knowledge of it.

The argument from non-cognition (*anupalabdhi*), characteristic of Dharmakīrti, is that when an object or state of affairs satisfies the conditions for knowability or perceptibility, its not being cognized allows us to conclude that it does not exist. Dharmakīrti maintains that the soul is the sort of thing that would be knowable by us (*upalabdhi-lakṣaṇa-prāpta*) as separate from essentially temporal episodes of awareness. But it is not thus known and so we may conclude that it does not exist.

Rāmakaṇṭha attributes to his Buddhist opponents the view that personal identity is just an essential temporal stream of experiences, continuously subject to destruction:

> Immediate experience proves that there is a perceiving consciousness, the basis of personality and different from the impersonal external world, that is different at each moment and in relation to each object. There is no further fact called soul. It is hard to prove on the basis of proof by non-observation the reality of an entity that is a possible object of cognition when it is never cognised. [NIPP p. 8]

The Buddhist says that we see consciousness appearing in many forms such as joy and despondency and concludes that we are a stream of impermanent cognitions. He further argues that where the knowing subject is permanent, it would be invariant and could not shift the focus of its attention from object to object. As Dharmakīrti (to whom Rāmakaṇṭha refers frequently) puts it:

> There is no permanent way of knowing because knowledge is authoritative when it applies to real things. Given the impermanence of knowable objects, it cannot be static. [*Pramāṇa-vārttika, Pramāṇa-siddhi* verse 10]

What is permanent cannot be causally effective either in the present moment or successively. It follows that there is no permanent identities but only streams of experiences in which cognitions differ from object to object. Moreover, cognition and its objects are identical because a difference between them is never known. It is not possible to know any object distinct from cognition, because there can be no relation between consciousness and the insentient.

Quoting Dharmakīrti again:

> Although awareness is undifferentiated, it is considered by the misguided to be differentiated into objects, perceivers and thoughts.

All of this is anathema to Rāmakaṇṭha, who is adamant that we are directly aware of the soul is an enduring substance:

> The soul is defined as that which is established by its own reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana-siddha*) as a stable continuant (*sthiratayā*) in as much as it is always the illuminator of objects.
>
> The self, which is the ever-uniform stable conscious perceiver, is not a conceptual construct in that it is reflexively given to each person as the observer of all objects. [NIPP 166 and MPAV 158]

> Given that perception proves the nature of the subject as the conscious agent of the direct perception of all objects, it is not possible to establish the non-existence of the self since it is self-evident. Being the subject of karmic experience means being a cognizer. That is the true form of the soul and it is self-evident to everyone. [NIPP p. 13]

> That whose nature is to have knowing as its essential property is the soul that is the subject of experiences. The soul is proved to exist for everyone because it is manifest in one's own direct experience. [*Kiraṇa* p. 53]

This atemporal soul is constantly manifest as the same in all mental acts. The individual consciousness that is an essential property of everyone is self-manifesting or reflexive. The reflexivity of consciousness means that when a subject is aware of some object or fact, *simultaneously and in virtue of the same act*, he is aware of himself as the subject or possessor of the experience. It is important to remember that in this sort of 'self-consciousness' the self does not appear as an object. As Rāmakaṇṭha puts it: 'It is not the case that there are two cognitions: one of the object and another of the self. Rather, when an awareness of an object is also aware of itself, the nature of the self is given as that reflexivity' [MPAV p. 157].

Rāmakaṇṭha has to reconcile the diverse and flowing character of our mental life with the continuous integrity of the soul that is its subject. The self is not reducible to the states that are its stream of consciousness. The self cannot be the same as the states because it is the very condition of those states occurring as a unified stream. The Buddhist takes the opposite position when he argues that consciousness is always changing: we only find awareness appearing in various modes such as joy and despondency but never encounter a separate entity called self [MPAV p. 150]. He concedes that even if the cognitive capacity of the perceiver is not momentary, it definitely is not permanent because it comes and goes as expressed in experiences like, 'I have a headache',

'this feels nice', 'my sorrow has gone away or it will pass' [MPAV p. 172]. Given that we experience cognitions as transitory, it follows that personality is in a state of constant flux, and a bundle of perceptions is all we are.

Rāmakaṇṭha responds by distinguishing two modes of awareness: the cognitive discrimination (*adhyavasāya*) and the permanent background consciousness. The former is variable because it is a property of the essentially material and mutable mind (*buddhi-dharma*). The latter is the awareness that is a constitutive feature of the human condition (*pauruṣam*). Its absence is never experienced as it is always encountered as uniform subjectivity [*Kiraṇatantra* (Goodall) p. 54]. The distinction enables him to say that thoughts and feelings may come and go, the succession of experiential states may indeed be variable, but the enduring subject of experiences remains constant, always revealing itself as the same.

It is undeniable that we experience a stream of consciousness, but this is different from saying that we are only that stream. Consciousness is a unity with a perspective upon its different states. The unity of consciousness means that at any given moment I may be looking at something, feeling something, thinking about something else, wanting something and deciding to do something without falling in to schizophrenic morass. The different conscious acts do not mean that my consciousness is fragmented. My awareness of the different objects and contents of those states is unified. Consciousness encompasses the range of mental operations.

Rāmakaṇṭha's response to the Buddhist account of experience appeals to two types of argument: one from the phenomenology of consciousness, and a hypothetical inference (*arthāpatti*) from the intelligibility of activity that has future goals:

> Everyone knows that he is a knowing subject on the basis of immediate pre-conceptual experience. The question is whether the perceiver is an appearance of mere moments, differing in earlier and later experiences, new every moment and in relation to each object, or is it something that never changes? The answer is that the constant light of consciousness is given for everyone in reflexive awareness. It knows no schism in itself despite the different imposed features that are the objects of awareness. In past, present and future, it is exempt from prior non-existence and destruction. Although experiencing the coming and going of many mental events such as the various means of knowing, the sense that one is the constant perceiver is unshaken. In the gaps between mental events, the light of consciousness is uninterrupted. Self-consciousness is unbroken in states such as deep sleep. It is called '*ātman*' because it is always known as self-illuminating.

> It is in reliance on this unchanging and unfailing background consciousness that people undertake actions with future consequences. Were it momentary, all activity would collapse. Who would act, where and why if no experience could extend to another moment, instantaneous awareness just ceasing? Activity would be impossible for someone supposing that they lived only for a moment, thinking that in another moment, 'that is not me, it is not mine'. Everyone would become inert, absorbed only in the luminescence of their own natures, lacking conscience of right and wrong and devoid of the many types of cognitions. This contradicts the immediate experience of everyone because activities presuppose the stability of the perceiver's consciousness. (NIPP 13–14 and MPAV 172–173)

Some Buddhists say:

> It is undeniable that there is the appearance of a stable and uniform perceiver. But that perceiver is not reflexively given. Rather, experience reveals a flow of perceiver-moments and unity is superimposed upon the stream by misleading synthetic cognitions due to perception of the similarity of the perceiver-moments, just as we attribute unity to flow of water and call it a river. But that is a mistake. This grasping at a stable identity (*ātmagraha*) is the root of all evil and it is what the Buddhist teaching aims to suppress. [NIPP p. 14]
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> Indeed, belief in the soul derives from beginningless ignorance (*anādi-avidyā*) and since it causes rebirth should be rejected by seekers after liberation who should practice repeated contemplation of the non-existence of soul. [MPAV 151]

Rāmakaṇṭha replies that this cannot be right because we are aware of the inner self as something different in kind from objects. If it were the product of superimposition, it would appear like an object and as different from whatever was performing the superimposition. But our experience is not like that. Rather, given that the self is the illuminator of objects, its nature is that of the internal perceiver. Any superimposer would have to be a stable subject of awareness. Were it manifest as purely momentary, superimposition would be impossible because that requires an enduring consciousness capable of a synthetic cognitive grasp of earlier and later [NIPP p. 15].

According to Buddhists of Dharmakīrti's school, an instant has no before or after. A momentary thought is no sooner come than gone. Its origin coincides with its destruction. If there is no endurance, how would memory and conceptual thought be possible since the agent of the synthesis of thoughts is the consciousness that is proper to the self? Memory and the synthesis of experiences involve conceptualization (*vikalpa*) which requires the mental synthesis

of earlier and later by a constant background awareness. But momentary cognitions cannot perform those functions [MPAV p. 159]. Moreover, how can an instantaneous perceiver objectify itself in such a way that it can mistakenly impute permanence to itself?

Finally, Rāmakaṇṭha of course rejects the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika view that the existence of what for them is a non-experiential principle of identity has to be inferred since it obviously cannot reveal itself. They posit the self as the single principle that is necessary for the unification of diverse sensory experiences, for example, touching, tasting and seeing the same thing. It also explains the possibility of the synthesis of earlier and later experiences over time. Because cognitions, volitions, pleasures, pains, efforts, merit, demerit and inherited tendencies are qualities (*guṇa*) they need a substrate (*āśraya*) that is a substance (*dravya*) and that substance is the self. Rāmakaṇṭha simply does not accept the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology about the relationship between qualities and their possessors. His view is that a substance or basic particular (*dravya*) is a confluence of properties (*guṇasaṃdrava* or *guṇasamudāya*). This is not the same as the Buddhist reductionist view because substance here means a persisting substrate, an object that is an integration of properties, where the whole is not a separate entity from its properties or parts. Rāmakaṇṭha concludes that because cognition, feelings and intentions are not separable qualities in their own right, we must establish on the basis of self-evidence, and not inference, that the capacity for knowing belongs to the nature of the self as its essential property [NIPP 10–11; K53; MPAV153].

Personal agency

The self is not just a stable cognizer or detached observer (as the Sāṃkhyas think), it is also a centre of free agency with causal powers (*kriyā-śakti*). But the Buddhist cannot make sense of the phenomenon of action since if the subject of experience were essentially temporal, it could not perform actions. When something is done by a single instantaneous cognition, its fruition would be another instant of cognition that would not occur in a later life of the instigator. Since the instants differ, the experiencer of the fruits of action will differ from the instigator. The experiencer of the fruit would be a different entity. The enjoyer of the fruit would be other than the conscious subject who was the agent of action [MPAV 165–166].

The Buddhist denies that when one person has done something, its fruits are experienced elsewhere on the grounds that actions and their consequences constitute different streams of experiences. Rāmakaṇṭha replies that the question, 'which stream is which?' has no determinate answer if the streams just consist of momentary entities where an earlier moment is followed by a later one. That would not be sufficient to yield real distinctions such that we could identify separate streams. In short, there would not be any individual streams. The Buddhist claims that a relation of similarity between moments individuates them into streams consisting of the five *skandhas* (the body, feelings, sensory perceptions, habits and conceptual thoughts). Rāmakaṇṭha says that there would have to be some sort of intimate connection between the moments. It cannot be produced by space or time since the Buddhist does not accept that they are realities in their own right. Nor can it derive from the essential natures of entities. There are two points here. Buddhists reject essences or unchanging natures. But in so far as anything may be conventionally treated as having a nature, such a nature derives from its place in a system of relations. So the notion cannot be appealed to as an explanation of the generation of those systems. Rāmakaṇṭha concludes that here is no proof of the existence of integrated streams of experiences because discrete instants cannot produce individual identities [MPAV p. 166].

The Buddhist doctrine of the essentially temporal nature of all entities involves a rejection of the theory upheld by mainstream Brahminical orthodoxy that actions are to be analysed in terms of specific factors (*kāraka-vāda*) such as a fixed starting point, the autonomous agent, the recipient, the object desired and means. They espouse a theory of causation according to which there are just processes or sequences of events (*kāraṇa-vāda*) in which individuals, whether agents or patients, are just aspects of a causal event, enjoying no special significance. The Brahminical view, according priority to substances and agents as causal factors, is succinctly expressed in the verse, 'The master of the factors in relation to action and inaction, whether it is currently active or not, is the factor called the agent.'

It is soteriologically crucial for Rāmakaṇṭha that the persisting self-conscious individual substances, embodied and enduring intact through time, are autonomous ritual and moral agents spontaneously capable of initiating novel sequences of events that follow from their decisions and that are not wholly produced by antecedent causal conditions. That is to say, souls are individual substances possessing innate causal powers that are dispositions to act in certain ways in appropriate circumstances. Where events involving

human actions are concerned, souls are, as it were, the glue that holds the members of a sequence of ephemeral events together as a causal process and thus account for its continuity. As we have seen, the stable and enduring *ātman*, the transcendental enabling condition of experience, which is given in experience but not produced by it, is exempt from determination by time. Its agency is not *determined* by sequences of events.

Personal agency, as opposed to behaviour which may be merely reactive, instinctive and non-conscious, is necessarily connected with consciousness and is introspectively manifest to oneself as the reason for one's physical exertions and movements. In the case of other people, it is analogously inferred from their bodily actions. Personal agency, which has the nature of autonomy (*svātantrya*) in that it is the rational basis for the function or non-function of all the factors involved in events (*kāraka*), is directly experienced as being responsible for effort and physical movements, the performing of religious and everyday actions having seen or unseen results. It cannot be denied because, like the state of being a cognizer, it is directly known to each as a form of internality in that one is the inner instigator of the factors implicit in events [NIPP pp. 95–96].

He claims that the Buddhist theory implies that it does not matter whether Devadatta provides services for monks or kills them. Since service and killing are equally treated as contributory causal aspects of an event, the merit and demerit proper to each would accrue indiscriminately to Devadatta and to the mendicants. Where could the difference lie if everything is just an aspect of a causal process that is a sequence of events? The Buddhist reply that the causal process is differentiated into streams that are the individual Devadatta as the instigator, service as the intended purpose and the mendicants as the beneficiaries then this amounts to acceptance of the *kāraka-vāda* which involves the categories of agent, object and instrument and not the process theory of causation (*kāraṇa-vāda*). And if the *kāraka* theory is established, so is the agency of the self [MPAV 171].

Śākta Śaiva traditions

As well as the *Śaiva Siddhānta* dualists there were many worshippers of forms of *Śiva* and the Goddess who subscribed to a non-dualistic (*advaita*) or monistic metaphysic. While believing that it is knowledge and not ritual that is essential for liberation, adherents of these cults enjoyed a rich liturgical life.

Some rituals confer specific benefits and powers. But ritual practice may also help to consolidate belief, deepen commitment and keep alive an original inspirational insight by preserving a sense of enlightened deliverance from the frustrations, changes and chances of daily life. Enlightenment is understood as recovery of one's true identity as the deity. Salvific realization may be achieved by ritual informed by gnosis, or by gnosis alone, or it may simply happen unexpectedly thanks to a purely fortuitous descent of divine grace. While enlightenment and liberation, understood as the salvific expansion of consciousness bestowed in initiation, are possible in the course of one's life (*jīvan-mukti*), most initiates have to wait for death, which is coterminous with the exhaustion of the residual *karma* appropriate to this life, to experience it fully. The life of ritual practice confirms and intensifies the original liberating experience, purifying it of conceptual elements. Thus enlightened, one sees the world in a new light.

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta

Utpaladeva (925–975 A.D.) follows Somānanda (900–950 A.D.), who was the original theorist of the *Pratyabhijñā* school. Somānanda's Śivadṛṣṭi expounds a form of absolute idealism, the philosophical outlook that denies that physical or material things have any reality independent of universal consciousness. An aspect of the argument is that if there were a real difference in nature between consciousness and material objects, knowledge of the world would be impossible. Material things, whether atoms or concrete wholes, on the one hand and consciousness on the other are utterly different categories and cannot be connected. Relation is possible only when categories have something in common. So a relation between thinking minds and objects is possible if consciousness is the common factor present in everything. To be is to be a manifestation of consciousness. All conscious subjects are essentially the same. The universal consciousness is identified as the supreme godhead named as Śiva, who is present everywhere. Everything is a manifestation of the single divine consciousness and ultimately there are no real individual identities.

Human problems start when we just think of ourselves as isolated individuals with caste-based social identities confronting a separate material environment. The point of religious practice is the recovery of one's true identity as Shiva through the expansion of one's conscious energy.

Somānanda criticizes *Advaita Vedantins* who think that the differentiated cosmos is an illusory manifestation (*vivarta*), due to mysterious ignorance, of the static, featureless Unconditioned Reality (*Brahman*). He attacks the type of idealism taught by the Buddhist *Vijñānavāda* that admits streams of consciousness but regards our experience of the material world as merely mental construction out of vestiges of prior experiences. Moreover, Buddhist temporalists cannot allow that there is a stable subject doing the imagining. Commonsense realists are criticized for admitting individual centres of consciousness and agency, but distinguishing them from their physical environments in such a way that no sense can be made of their relation to it. *Śaiva Siddhanta* dualists are castigated for positing themselves as individuals independent of godhead.

It is Utpaladeva (925–975) who provides a philosophical defence and articulation of the sort of visionary spirituality that is central to the *Krama* cult. His works include the *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikās* [IPK] (with his own commentaries), a treatise in the Nyāya style proving the existence of God called the *Īśvara-Siddhi*, a work called the *Ajaḍapramātṛ-Siddhi* (about the knowing subject) and a treatment of the topic of relations called the *Saṃbandha-Siddhi*.

Abhinavagupta (975–1025 A.D.) was an influential theologian, philosopher and aesthetician of remarkable profundity and intellectual sophistication and erudition who belonged to the Tantric *Trika* cult. The *Trika* (meaning 'triad') was a system of ritual originating and developing in Kashmir whose goal is the acquisition by the votary, who has undergone a caste-obliterating initiation ritual, of the supernatural powers of a triad of female deities. The latter personify the human-friendly as well as the terrifying and destructive aspects of existence. Associated with this cult was that of the eight mother goddesses and their expressions in families (*kula* – hence the term *Kaula* for forms of *Śiva*-worship allied to the *Trika*) of female spirits called *Yoginīs*. They may be invoked and pacified, in the impure cremation ground on the margins of society, with offerings of impure and hence potent substances such as blood, flesh, wine and sexual fluids. The cult adopted the horrific, all-devouring *Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī* form of the goddess *Kālī* as the unifying form of the original three goddesses. From 900 A.D. the *Trika* was in competition with the Śaiva Siddhānta dualistic system of ritual and theology, according to which really individual selves inhabit a physical world. Assimilating the sophisticated Pratyabhijñā philosophy, the *Trika* was able to defeat the challenges posed by dualism, Vedantic illusionism and Buddhism. Its explicitly sexual rituals

underwent a process of domestication and internalization. This trend appears in the thought of Abhinavagupta where orgasm is understood as obliterating one's self-centredness and manifesting the expansion of that blissful self-awareness that is the same as the universal consciousness projecting all phenomena. The ritual use of impure substances, which had been understood as sources of magical powers, is held to induce ecstasy, a sense of freedom arising from violation of the taboo. Bondage to rebirth is understood as a state of ignorant self-limitation that understands the orthodox values of purity and impurity, as objective realities. Enlightenment presupposes the realization that anxious concern about caste and related values such as one's Vedic learning, family's status, prescribed conduct, conventional virtues and prosperity are aspects of an inauthentic identity. Liberation from rebirth consists in the realization, typically through yoga and meditation, of oneself as a contracted form of the universal consciousness. Freedom just is this awareness: it is not a separate phenomenon produced by knowledge.

Abhinavagupta's major philosophical works are commentaries on Utpaladeva's *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikās*, on the *Mālinīvijayottara Tantra*, the *Tantrāloka*, abbreviated as the *Tantrasāra*, which voluminously expounds the doctrines, yoga and rituals of the *Trika* cult, the *Parātrīśikā-Vivaraṇa*, the *Bodhapañcadaśikā* (translated below) and the *Paramārthasāra*, a translation into Śaiva categories of a Vaiṣṇava work attributed to Ādiśeṣa.

As well as demonstrating the coherence, soteriological value and finality of the forms of Śaivism to which he was personally committed, these works offered include sustained critiques of the dualism of the Ś*aiva Siddhānta* ritualism, the *Vedāntic* illusionism maintaining that all normal human experience is infected by ignorance of the truth about reality and the Buddhist rejection of persisting substances (*nairātyma*), including the soul. Indeed, there is a sense in which here we find a polar opposite to Buddhism. While for the Buddhists, the world is at base an impersonal process of events where we who mistakenly think of ourselves as persisting centres of thinking and willing are in fact but expressions of external forces over which we have no control, for these Śaivas the world, pervaded by the divine consciousness, is not ultimately inimical to our best interests.

Basic to his eirenic outlook is a belief that other doctrinal systems are not to be treated as opponents but as aspects of the self-expression of the supreme conscious reality. He formulates an inclusive hierarchy of belief systems in accordance with how closely they approximate to the view that ultimate reality is dynamic universal consciousness.

Abhinavagupta elaborates and refines the absolute idealism taught by Somānanda and Utpaladeva. The world derives from a single universal, autonomous and dynamic consciousness that expresses itself in an infinite variety of subjects, objects and acts of awareness. The seeker after release from rebirth is to meditate upon the nature of consciousness, oscillating between the manifestation of objects (*prakāśa*) and reflexive awareness (*vimarśa*). In ordinary individual awareness, the representation of what are taken to be external objects, and hence duality, predominates. The adept should reflect that what is experienced as the objective world that we inhabit is nothing other than the transcendent consciousness, expressed as the union of Śiva and Śakti, expressing itself. The subject-object polarity is understood as internal to consciousness. Ritual, yoga and meditation enable us to deconstruct that polarity, with a consequent collapse of all discursive thought. Contracted self-awareness is thus dissolved, along with thinking about the world in terms of external objects confronted by individual subjects and agents.

Following Somānanda and Utpaladeva, Abhinavagupta believes that the mind-independence of matter is impossible. Trans-individual consciousness causes the manifestations that we experience appear as if distinct from the subjects of experience. While *Advaita-Vedānta* understands the foundational consciousness as static, for this school it is self-conscious activity and will positing itself as apparently other than itself. It operates through projecting objective Ideas (*ābhāsa*) that are the contents of our experiences. Against Buddhism he argues for the self-conscious subject, the permanent background to experience, persisting as a stable unity that synthesizes mental states. Without such a principle, there would only be momentary, self-contained, unrelated mental episodes.

Central to his philosophy is a critique of the notion that our thoughts represent physical objects. He argues that consciousness can only represent what is itself conscious. We only know our experiences. It makes no sense to say that consciousness represents what is mind-independent because as soon as something is represented by consciousness it is no longer mind-independent.

Absolute Idealism

The philosophical articulation of the Śākta cults is a form of Absolute Idealism: the view that everything is a manifestation of a single trans-individual

consciousness, which is the only reality that has independent existence. (Since there has been some controversy about whether some of the Indian thinkers who have traditionally been characterized as idealists really are idealists, I should say that I take idealism to mean the rejection of the possibility of material substance that exists independently of some consciousness. On this interpretation, Vasubandhu and his followers in the Vijñānavāda tradition, as well as Utpaladeva, Abhinavagupta and Kṣemarāja are idealists.) This sort of idealism is not philosophical scepticism about the existence of the external world. It is the affirmation of the real world as a partial expression of the divine nature. The world really is independent of human minds. It is not fabricated by individual perceivers. It is not surprising that people who devote much time to mental purification by profound meditative exercises, in which 'thought-forms' sometimes appear to the practitioner as external, should incline towards an idealist mentality.

For these ecstatic idealists the world exists only as its representation in consciousness: it is not the case that there are two types of substance, the mental and the physical. The theorists of these cults understand the sole conscious reality as dynamic, projecting both finite centres of awareness and the experiences of the kinds of objects that they enjoy.

In his *Śivasūtra-vimarśinī*, Abhinavagupta's successor Kṣemarāja expresses the idealist mentality like this:

> Consciousness manifests itself both internally [as thoughts and feelings] and externally [as things and events] in a variety of forms. Because objects only exist in relation to consciousness, the world has the nature of consciousness. For entities cannot be known without consciousness. So it is concluded that consciousness has assumed the forms of entities. By contemplating entities, we can rationally understand that knowable phenomena are conscious by nature. Consciousness and its objects have a single nature because they are experienced simultaneously. [ad Sūtra 30]

In addition to the difficulties about finding a coherent conception of matter (that which keeps physics in business) and the philosophical problems of explaining our perception of the physical world, there are a number of considerations that encourage people to think that consciousness, not matter, is the basic reality, and to adopt the idealist outlook. Try to imagine a cosmos in which there never has been and is no conscious life. Remember that there are there are no observers, no experiencers, no intelligences. What would it be like? Your initial thoughts may be that it is all black, hard, soft, fluid, hot, cold.

But it isn't even that. Any of those characterizations presupposes that there is an observer or experiencer. As Abhinavagupta says,

> Regarding the modes of thinking, 'I know', 'I knew', 'I shall know' which are founded upon reflexive subjectivity, what else is there to know? If these did not shine, the cosmos would be dense darkness, or rather *it would not even be that*. 'How does the knower know itself?' If one denies the conscious subject, what question and what answer would there be? [IPV p. 71]

We find that by strictly eliminating observers or intelligences, nothing has any meaning. In the lifeless world there isn't really any-thing: there literally are no things. This is because the identification and classification of entities requires conscious observers. In the dead world of chaotic matter, there cannot be any *intrinsic* structures, organization, repeatable forms or natural laws. Such organizing principles have to come from the outside. They cannot emerge from within. That which imposes order cannot arise from the indeterminate morass upon which it then imposes order. If natural laws impose regularities, they must be different from that which they regulate. They have to be external factors. Now our 'bleak and blank' chaotic world is by definition purely physical. So if there are to be external factors, structuring principles that necessarily are external, they must be other than the physical. And what is non-physical is conscious. Leaving imagination to one side, can we even conceive of their being a world without consciousness? A conception of reality as it is in itself not involving mention of human perceptual capacities would be a complex mathematical structure, but that is not our world because human experience has been left out of the picture.

Perhaps the best we can say is that there would be something there, but it would not mean anything. Indeed, merely saying, 'there would be something' does not really mean anything. So some people think that it is senseless to say that there could be anything at all if there were no consciousness, and this is what idealists mean when they say that there can be no unexperienced reality. Everything depends upon consciousness. Consciousness, not matter, is basic. There is another sense in which everything may be considered to depend upon consciousness. Let us not be afraid of the obvious and accept that there are physical objects in space. If what such objects are is to be understood or determined, if their existence is to be *established*, if they are to mean anything, some sort of intelligence different from those objects is required. But consciousness differs in a crucial respect from physical objects. It reveals or establishes its

own existence. It knows its own nature simply by being what it is. It does not need anything outside itself to do it for it. In this sense, it is consciousness, not matter, which is basic.

The essential dynamism of consciousness: prakāśa and vimarśa

People initiated into these Śaiva Śākta traditions accept the categories recognized by their dualistic co-religionists, but claim that they are ultimately aspects of the one purely conscious divine reality. One of the ways in which they differ from the Advaita-Vedāntins is in their insistence that the unconditioned creative consciousness is dynamic, not inactive. The transcendent trans-individual consciousness (*parā-saṃvit*) is the pure actuality of self-awareness. It knows itself. It is fully realized, perfect and self-sufficient, ever and always wholly present to itself. It is a state of peaceful repose (*viśrānti*) where actuality and potentiality are in perfect dynamic equilibrium. Unconditioned by space, time or form, this state of perfect balance lacks nothing and so has nothing to accomplish. The divine sovereignty consists in perfect freedom (*svātantryam*). This trans-individual consciousness generates the finite realm of multiplicity and relations. Divinity, understood as the co-inherence of *Śiva* and *Śakti*, spontaneously contracts itself to produce the matrix of individual knowers and agents, all experiences and acts of knowing and all phenomena that appear as if they were separate from it. We shall see how this activity is conceived not as impersonal and unspecific surges of energy, but on the model of the processes of finite intelligence. Unconditioned consciousness is the freedom of self-determination. Creation is neither necessary to the Divinity, nor does it require recourse to an independent material principle.

Śiva and *Śakti* correspond to *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, two modes of the one consciousness. These terms are rich and complex in meaning. *Prakāśa* literally means light, in this context, the light of consciousness. *Vimarśa* means self-awareness or reflexivity, and representation. The divine consciousness is an eternal dynamic and vibrant interplay between these two facets. To grasp the difference we need to explore some aspects of the internal variety of the notion of mind. We can distinguish *psychological* states and *phenomenal* consciousness. We can think of perceptions and cognitions as sometimes purely functional psychological states. Information is received by perceptions and stored as memories. In terms of this outlook, a subject is in a perceptual state

whenever their psychological apparatus is receiving and processing data from the environment. A subject can have a perception in this sense of being in an informational state even in the absence of the corresponding subjective awareness. This is what is sometimes called being on automatic pilot. My field of vision at the present moment is greater than what I am seeing. Sometimes I walk down the road, oblivious of my surroundings, on automatic pilot, as it were. But what we call *experiences* are *phenomenal* conscious states. There is something that *it is like* to have them or to be in the state. This is sometimes called the subjective character of experience – what *it feels like*. A state is phenomenally conscious if there is something it is like to be in that state. This is one of the meanings of *vimarśa*. Abhinavagupta says that it is the life, the vitality of awareness (*prakāśa*). Items of belief and knowledge, when they are to be stored, are potentially conscious states that can be brought to mind and made explicit in awareness. A thought or representation is 'alive' if it is being used in reasoning and in the direct rational control of action and speech.

The *prakāśa* of objects may mean their objective manifestation, their capacity to become objects of explicit awareness. *Prakāśa* is like a light shining in a dark room. But this in itself is insufficient for understanding. This is where *vimarśa* comes in. Explicitly conscious representation of objects, their shining in the consciousness of a perceiver is *vimarśa*. A subject's explicit awareness of itself as a centre of cognition and agency is called 'I-representation' (*aham-vimarśa*). (Utpaladeva says that the reflexive awareness 'I' is not really a concept because it is simple and does not require us to make any discriminations because the 'I' is infallible and immediately given.)

Abhinavagupta says that consciousness without reflexivity (*vimarśa*) would be blind. Reflexivity is both Śiva's power (*Śakti*) of self-awareness and his representation of objects (and perceivers) within and to himself. The latter is called their being reflected in his own mirror.

We said that *prakāśa* is like a light introduced into a dark room. Although there is illumination, this is insufficient for understanding. When the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas say that cognition is just the illumination of objects (*artha-prakāśa-buddhi*), they are treating consciousness as a searchlight illuminating objects in the world. Take the case of immediate sensory perception and think of it as pure observation. A video camera does something functionally analogous, but it does not *understand*. The view of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta is that *vimarśa* must be implicit even in immediate sensory perception if the perception is to *mean* anything. For a perception to mean anything it has to

be raised to the level of explicit consciousness. There has to be a phenomenal, experiential component (*vimarśa*). Also, for the perception to really mean anything, it must be connected with other thoughts, and this sort of synthetic experience (*anusaṃdhāna*) is also *vimarśa*.

We should bear in mind that it is not the case that conscious experience consists of discrete cognitions of isolated objects. We do not see bare objects or simple single things. The notion of *present* experience may be misleading. In conscious experience we bring to bear a mentality informed by retained memories and expectations for the future. I am looking at a cup on the table in front of me. (I don't think, 'there's an object above another object at such and such a distance' and then identify the objects and relations in the state of affairs.) I know that it holds the coffee that I made earlier. I reach out, pick it up and take a sip. I enjoy it. I know that it will be there later to be enjoyed again. This ordinary experience is replete with acts of cognitive identification, synthesis and separation. It is also pervaded by language. This is *vimarśa*.

The polarity of Śiva and Śakti, Prakāśa and Vimarśa is expressed in a text belonging to the *Krama* tradition as follows:

> Śiva's tranquil state is the highest form of self-awareness. But there is an even higher state that is ever so slightly distinct, and that is the abode of the Goddess. The whole of reality comes from the creative light of consciousness (*prakāśa*), itself deriving from the sheer delight that lacks nothing and which itself finds its rest in the uncreated light wherein there are no traces of awareness of differences. The Goddess is the unsurpassable tranquil state that has consumed the traces of awareness of existences that had remained in the uncreated light. Śiva's nature is the tranquil state that devours time. The Goddess is the perfection of that tranquillity. (*Mahānayaprakāśa* 3.104–11. Text cited in Sanderson (2007), p. 309)

Reinterpretation of Śaiva Siddhānta concepts

Not only does the Divinity always know itself, but it also knows itself in and through the creative process. Individual transmigrating selves are modes of the Divinity that permits its own contraction by *māyā*, *karma* and *mala*. Whereas the Śaiva Siddhāntins understand the latter as a material substance attaching to the souls and restricting their powers of knowledge and action, the non-dualists think that it is ignorance in the form of the unenlightened acceptance that one is just a limited individual bound to rebirth, subject to caste and social and religious obligations, in danger of pollution by objectively

real impurities that hinder spiritual progress and hence constrained by the Brahminical value of purity, and one for whom freedom (*mokṣa*) is a remote possibility, difficult of attainment. This manifold Ignorance causes bondage. Ignorance at base means the mistaken belief that there are individual entities, including souls, which are capable of existing independently of the Divinity. This ignorance is *constitutive* in that it establishes individuality.

Māyā, for the Siddhāntins the substrative cause of all objects, physical and mental faculties and experiences in the impure levels of the cosmos that we inhabit, is understood as the projection of the whole differentiated realm of objectivity so that it appears as if it were other than the Divinity, and from the many distinct and finite subjects of experience. It may also be understood in terms of thinking of oneself as a limited individual who confronts a mind-independent objective order. Similarly, *karma* is not a factor external to the self. Rather, it is the conviction on the part of the self-limiting subject that good and bad deeds really have a bearing upon one's destiny.

Bondage to rebirth just is the *belief* that one is limited resulting from a failure on the part of people caught up in the conventional dualistic outlook, with its bifurcation of individual conscious subjects and material objects, to understand that their true identity is pure, autonomous consciousness. Liberation is the non-discursive (*nirvikalpa*), direct and fully expanded experience (i.e. not merely a propositional thought *that* one is identical with the Divinity) of being nothing other than the transcendent consciousness (*parā saṃvit*), perpetually delighting in itself. In short, one becomes the divinity: 'I am Śiva and this whole world is my self-representation'. Śaiva Siddhāntins may imaginatively identify themselves with the deity in liturgical contexts, but they do not believe that they really are God. That is the crucial difference between the dualistic and non-dualistic religious paths.

We have seen that the ultimate goal is to lose all sense of personal individuality by recovering the awareness that one is not different from the Divinity. This is sometimes expressed as immersion (*samāveśa*) in the realization of the all-encompassing supremacy of Śiva, who is autonomous and undivided consciousness uniting *prakāśa* and *vimarśa*, where the universe is experienced as non-different from one's identity. In its extroverted mode, trans-individual consciousness projects all experiencing subjects and all phenomena in a kaleidoscopic manifestation that is always aware of itself. In its introverted mode, consciousness simply delights in itself. What we experience are the multifarious self-representations of the trans-individual consciousness that contains within itself all the projections. Experiencers, as well as phenomena, are modes of consciousness contracted by time, place and forms.

The *Krama* cult and the Pratyabijñā philosophy

The *Pratyabhijñā* philosophy is a sophisticated reflective articulation of the *Krama* cult, central to which is the attainment of liberating gnosis in the context of a form of liturgy known as the 'Worship of the Twelve *Kālīs*'. Freedom from rebirth is just re-cognition ('*pratyabhijñā*'): the recovery of knowledge of the truth that one's real and ultimate identity is nothing other than the trans-individual consciousness that projects all phenomena, experiences and limited subjects on the part of a subject that had previously considered itself as an individual thinking agent confined by space, time and embodiment. The multiplicity of individual subjects in reality is the one Subject and only this subject exists. This single real subject diversifies itself into limited subjects and objects. The boundaries are termed '*upādhis*' ('superimposed conditions' rather than genuine properties). The point is that while seen real to us, any changes in and of them do not affect the unconditioned subject. This is an absolute idealism according to which everything that is experienced by us as material and everything apparently individual is projected by a single consciousness. It is argued that whatever causes the physical world must be non-physical because the world needs a source that is external to it and different in kind from it. Since individual centres of consciousness are localized by matter, the ultimate source must be unconditioned, creative universal consciousness. They argue that we can only make sense of the coherence and continuity of our experiences, memories and interpersonal communications if they belong to single persisting conscious subjects that inhabit a stable world regulated by objective structures. This is extended macrocosmically: the universe of subjects and objects holds together because it has a single conscious source that preserves it in being. The co-ordination of diverse subjects and objects is possible only if they are aspects of a single, universal field of experience. Universal Consciousness causes objects of awareness to appear as if distinct from the limited subjects of experience. The forms figuring in our awareness express the Ideas (*ābhāsa*) projected by the universal consciousness.

The goal of religious practice is the transcendence of limited individual subjectivity, indeed of any subjectivity whatsoever. The state of bondage to rebirth means thinking that one is a self, a person or personality. Real freedom means the obliteration of petty selfhood. Enlightenment is the realization that

the subject that has mistakenly and selfishly considered itself as an individual is identical with the universal transcendental conscious energy called the *Śiva-Śakti* state. Freedom from rebirth is just the recognition that, 'I am Shiva and this whole world is my self-expression'. The authentic identity is already present as the constant and undeniable self-awareness that is in the background of all experiences, but it must be re-cognized and reflected upon as the ultimate conscious principle manifesting itself as all limited subjects, acts and objects of experience.

What appear as external, physical objects depend upon consciousness. Since causal agency is exclusively a property of conscious agents capable of volition, creativity by the physical is impossible. Since only an idea can be like and thus represent an idea, consciousness would not represent matter if matter were something totally different from it. We cannot experience anything other than consciousness.

Krama practice

The Worship of the *Kālīs* is a meditative sequence of twelve phases (each symbolized by one of the twelve Kālīs) that effects an expansion of consciousness from the confines of limited personhood to an enlightened form of awareness in whose light the everyday world becomes transfigured. In other words, what had been experienced as the merely mundane is recognized as the self-expression of the Divinity. In the course of this worship, consciousness transforms itself as it 'devours' both its own contents and its awareness of itself as individual. One contemplates the emanation (*sṛṣṭi*) of the cosmos from its transcendent source, its conservation in being or stasis (*sthiti*), and its withdrawal (*saṃhāra*) into that source, followed by its repeated emanation and so forth. That process of cosmic emanation is mirrored on the microcosmic level in the sequential structure of normal cognition that reaches out to objects, focuses attention upon them and absorbs them into itself. A clue to the nature of the divine activity is found in such modalities of human consciousness, which mirror creation, conservation and withdrawal. Our states may be more or less self-aware. Sometimes we are in an extroverted state, totally absorbed in something and not really self-aware. But self-awareness brings consciousness to life. The interplay of extroversion and introversion in our own minds is held to be a microcosmic imitation of the divine nature. In the *Krama* ritual one symbolically contemplates the cyclical process of cosmic emanation, stasis and

reabsorption as represented by the path of cognition from its starting point as the initial state of the knowing subject (*pramātā*), via the internal mental faculties and the extroverted faculties of will, cognition and action (*pramāṇa*), to its intentional object (*prameya*), and then back again as the object is internalised in the subject. The phenomenal representations of the objects are withdrawn into the knowing subject, which is the terminus or resting point (*viśrānti*) of the process ending with something understood. Worship culminates in 'the phase of the nameless' (*Anākhya-cakra*), the unifying basis of the process of projection, conservation in being and withdrawal. This is the dissolution of all differentiated modes of cognition into the radiance of consciousness that is common to all mental acts and states. The final phase is symbolically expressed as the Goddess *Kālī*. She is beyond being and non-being, an abyss of pure light in which the powers of knowledge and action have merged, and where the distinctions between subjects, acts and objects of knowing have collapsed. From her unconditioned nature the diversified cosmos is manifest. She is attainable only in mystic gnosis. As Abhinavagupta's successor Kṣemarāja (1000–50 A.D.) puts it in his *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* 19:

> By means of the internal trance of the *Krama* he remains immersed in expanded consciousness while still living in the world, and in this way achieves the final goal. In this process, he enters in from outside. By the very force of this penetration, he enters from within into his outer identity.

The language of penetration, emission, immersion and withdrawal may be suggestive of sexual activity. Indeed, Abhinavagupta says that such is an appropriate context. In fact, any ecstatic experience will do.

Let us now look at what Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta have to say in some of the Verses on the Re-cognition of the Divinity (*Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārikā* (Torella, 2002)) and their explanations of them.

Memory, cognition and differentiation

Īśvarapratyabhijñā-kārika 1.4.1

> The unrestricted consciousness that is the perceiver of the object previously experienced and that is still in existence at the later time, realises that the present object is the one previously experienced. This is called remembering.

By considering the operations of finite minds – which are microcosmic expressions of the 'Divine Mind', we can achieve some insight into the nature of the transcendent consciousness.

At the end of the third section of the first chapter of his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikās* (IPK), Utpaladeva mentions the three divine powers of knowing, memory and differentiation (referred to in *Bhagavad Gītā* XV.5):

> If there were not one conscious Divinity who contains the infinite universe within himself and who has the powers of knowledge, memory and differentiation, the harmonious functioning (*sthiti*) of the human world, which stems from the synthesis by consciousness (*anusamdhāna*) of different and separate thoughts, would cease'.

Most Brahminical philosophers accept the definition of memory in *Yoga-Sūtra* 1.11: 'memory is the retention of an object previously experienced'. The alternative Buddhist account says that some perceptions leave a vestige or trace (*saṃskāra*) in a stream of experiences. But while their theory may be an adequate account of the mechanical transmission of information, it leaves out the subjective, phenomenological component that is integral to memory. The Buddhists say that the trace is revived at a later time when an experience calls to remind us of something similar about the past. But there are problems here. Experiential memory (as opposed to my recall of the stored information that the Sanskrit word for horse is '*aśva*'*)* is both memory of the past object and of the previous perceiving. If everything is momentary and in a flux, the stream of experiences is in a different state and past objects and events have ceased to exist. Memory cannot be the recovery of a past *experience* if that has not been retained. The trace is neither the original experience nor the object as it was cognized. Hence we are not in a position to know that the present perception resembles the past one. The account also fails to do just to the phenomenology of memory experience. We don't just recall past objects and events: we often remember *what it was like for us* to experience them and the account leaves this out.

Experiential memory presupposes a unitary and active consciousness that surveys different moments of time. This subject is the agent that can relate cognitions occurring at different times. Given this, we can say that the past and present perceptions are the same in their phenomenological aspects, in their self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*), and that this provides the link between them.

The idea is that if all minds and phenomena are aspects of a single conscious field, we can explain how we can have knowledge of other minds, and communicate with one another. We can now overcome what is sometimes thought to be a problem for types of mind-matter dualism: how can there be any sort of relation such completely different realities as consciousness and insentient matter?

Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Kārikā (IPK) 1.4.3–5

> There would be no manifestation of the object being remembered if it appeared as separate from the memory [i.e. were it not manifested in the present as an idea internal to consciousness but as something external and distinct from consciousness]. Therefore the unification of cognitions occurring at different times presupposes that there is a persisting subject of experiences. In memory the former experience does not appear like a separate external object, since it appears as resting within the self and is expressed as, 'I experienced this in the past'.

In his introduction to the fifth section of the first chapter of his *Īśvarapratyabhijñā-Vimarśinī* Abhinavagupta says that Utpaladeva begins with the power of knowing (*jñāna-śakti*), and proceeds to say that the light of consciousness is essence of objects. The text then establishes the existence of realities independent of finite minds by refuting the Vijñānavāda view that mental variety derives from stored traces or vestiges (*vāsanā*) of prior perceptions. He then rejects the direct realist view that sense perception establishes the true nature of external objects. Next he rejects the view that the existence of external objects is known by inference. Then he shows that we know by reflective awareness that the true nature of external objects is that they are included in the Absolute consciousness. He goes on to argue on the basis of pre-reflective immediate perception (*anubhava*), scripture and logic that self-awareness is the *very life* of the knowing subject's consciousness. Then he states that reflexive consciousness is foundational because it constitutes the ideal types of knowable objects (*jñeyam śuddham*) and the form of the knowing subject that contains them. Although consciousness is uniform, it is diversified into acts and subjects of knowing. He then says that just as reflexive awareness pertains to knower, it is also the very life of thoughts which may be non-conceptual or conceptual in form.

IPK 1.5.1

> The manifestation as external to consciousness of entities that are manifested in present experience is possible only if they are internal to consciousness.

Abhinavagupta supplies the question to which the verse is an answer: Direct experience (*anubhava*) is held to be the basis of memory and conceptualization. If objects appear in direct experience as separate from the knowing subject, they should appear like that in memory and conceptualization also. But they do

not. So memory and conceptualization cannot be the basis of memory and conceptualization.

Abhinavagupta explains that the verse deals with the nature of direct experience, which is a form of the power of knowing (*jñāna-śakti*) and of the sense in which objects are experienced as external to consciousness. He says that the clear and distinct perception of objects as distinct from the finite knowing subject is rationally intelligible only if they are one with the unconditioned subject that is pure consciousness and which makes them appear as separate. The divine *jñāna-śakti* effects the manifestation as different from the finite subject of what is internal to unconditioned consciousness.

IPK 1.5.2

> If the object were not of the nature of the light of consciousness (*prakāśa*), it would remain unilluminated as it was before it was known. The light of consciousness is not different from the object. The light of consciousness is the nature of the object.

Abhinavagupta says: Objects have to be illuminated by an external source. If they revealed themselves, every object would always be apparent to everyone. The same applies if we understand cognition as illuminating objects external to consciousness that were previously 'in darkness'. This is Kumārila's view that consciousness introduces a new feature, luminosity, into objects. It would be difficult to explain in these circumstances why the object does not appear to everyone.

Without consciousness, nothing can be established and universal blindness would follow. If objects are not constituted by *prakāśa*, they would be as unmanifested at the rise of cognition as they were prior to that.

He rejects the dualist view that there are two categorically distinct realms: material objects and consciousness. How could they be connected? The problem does not arise if we accept that consciousness is the essence of objects that are non-different from it.

If cognitions are unique in the case of each object, they could not be synthesized because each discrete cognition would be confined to itself. This is avoided if consciousness is unified awareness of which individual cognitions, and the different conscious operations are modes.

If consciousness that is totally separate from objects is the illuminator of objects we encounter another problem:

IPK 1.5.3

> If the light (*prakāśa*) were intrinsically undifferentiated and different from objects, objective reality would be confused. The object that is illuminated must itself be of the nature of the light of consciousness because that which does not have that nature cannot be established.

Utpaladeva explains: undifferentiated light that is different from objects would illuminate every object equally. So there would be no basis for the specific discrimination of individual objects.

The Absolute Idealist's argumentative strategy for there being a single all-encompassing light of consciousness that projects the variety of manifestations has three stages:

- The rejection of direct realism about objects perceived as occupying a mind-independent domain.
- The rejection of the Representationalist view, according to which the existence of mind-independent domain is inferred.
- The rejection of forms of subjective idealism that drift into solipsism.

Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta hold that we can explain mental variety and complexity only if it derives from a single conscious source. It is the Sautrāntikas who think that the mind-independent realm of unique particulars must be inferred as the cause of such variety, and to a statement of their outlook we now turn:

IPK 1.5.4

> If the light of consciousness is undifferentiated, it cannot cause a diverse and complex manifestation. Because such a manifestation is inexplicable in these terms, we must infer external objects as its cause.

IPK 1.5.5

> [An argument against a *Vijñana-vada* Buddhist idealist]
>
> A diverse revival of karmic residues cannot be the cause [of experiential variety]. In that case there would be the question of what causes the variety in such revival.

Abhinavagupta summarizes the Representationalist position: the causes of successive variety in intrinsically undifferentiated consciousness are the

reflections of external forms that correspond to the reflections. The external is to be inferred but we still call it perceptible.

The reasoning is: awareness is intrinsically undifferentiated: its true form is just light. Undifferentiated light cannot be the cause of different representations. This leads us to infer an external domain separate from cognition that consists of many different forms which successively cast reflections of their nature in consciousness. The reflections are similar to what is reflected and there is a sort of correspondence between them [like that between a map and a territory].

The Sautrāntika contends that the idealist's explanation of experiential variety as deriving from the re-awakening of sub-conscious latent traces (*vāsanā*) of prior perceptions does not make sense. We know that such re-awakening is responsible for memory, but here we are looking for the cause of variety in present experiences. Let us provisionally accept the theory that the latent traces are powers enabling cognitions to produce ideas of objects. Their re-awakening means their fitness to produce their own effects. In this way arises the variety of ideas. The problem here is that although the representations in our minds do not strictly mirror reality, still their causes must be real if they are genuinely productive. If the traces are the causes of ideas, they must be both different from consciousness and objectively real. So this theory is a version of realism about the external disguised under a different name. Let there be a variety of subconscious traces. In that case, given the idealist view that there are no entities, space or time distinct from consciousness that could be the cause of variety by activating the traces, if consciousness is uniform variety would appear simultaneously. It is false that other cognitions occurring in a stream are the causes of the awakening of diverse ideas because if all mental states (pleasures and pains, cognitions of objects and awareness of places and times) are just awareness and awareness is essentially just light, given the indivisibility of essence, there would be no differentiation in awareness.

With respect to other mental states constituting other knowing subjects (which the Buddhist calls 'streams') there is the same lack of individuation. If we restrict ourselves to the point of view of subjective awareness we cannot form an objective conception of there being more than one such stream. We can only conceive of thoughts happening for that one stream. The Sautrāntika's conclusion is that we cannot account for experiential variety by appealing to a sub-conscious store of latent traces. So it is established that if consciousness is undifferentiated pure light, and so cannot cause different ideas, it is necessary to infer an external realm.

Utpaladeva now states his own view:

IPK 1.5.6

> That may be the case. But why posit the external on the grounds that we cannot explain things otherwise, when all everyday activities *can* be explained if all things are manifestations of the single divine consciousness?

Abhinavagupta comments that there is no need to posit an external domain since all worldly life can be explained in terms of Ideas (*ābhāsa*). It is impossible to establish the existence of things independent of consciousness. We cannot make sense of the notion of material substance. The Nyāya theory that wholes inhere in their parts is invalid because there is no proof of inherence. No sense can be made of the Buddhist theories about the composition of macroscopic entities out of atoms.

The theory of the *ābhāsas* (Ideas) is crucial to Abhinavagupta's metaphysic. They are the primary realities that the trans-individual consciousness manifests. They are objective thought-contents that can be grasped by everyone. *Ābhāsas* are universal properties. They are instantiated as objects, and the states of affairs arising from those objects' interactions, by their mutual delimitation and by their connection with space and time. The *ābhāsas* space and time are particularly important in that they impart particularity, and suppress the notions of eternity and omnipresence which produce the form of universality. Synthetic mental faculty (*anusaṃdhāna*) identifies the individual entities that are constituted by the Ideas. According to this account of general Ideas as objective types, when anyone has an experience of blue, the idea 'blue' is the same whatever the relevant mental connection (which may be seeing, imagining, remembering or delighting in). Likewise the idea 'seeing' is the same whether it is connected with a pot or a cloth. A round blue pot is the coalescence of the ideas round, blue and pot.

IPK 1.5.7

> Like a Yogin, just by the power of will, the Divinity whose nature is consciousness, manifests all phenomena lying within him as external without needing any independent substrative cause.

IPK 1.5.8–9

> We an only use inference if what is to be established has been perceived somewhere before. The sensory faculties are only inferred in very general terms as causes.
>
> Objects that are totally external to consciousness are never manifested to consciousness at all. Thus their existence cannot be established through inference.

We can infer the presence of fire from the presence of smoke because we are familiar with smoke, fire and their relationship. But inference cannot operate when one of its terms is totally unknown (especially in this case where that which is to be established is by definition noumenal and outside the range of our cognitive capacities). This is not inference but pure speculation. It looks like Utpaladeva may be going too far here. We can infer the existence of the sensory-faculties from the occurrence of perceptions, although, *ex hypothesis,* we never perceive those faculties. What he is in fact saying is that we do not infer the actual natures of the sense-faculties but only their generic characteristic of being something that has a causal function. So we are not inferring and understanding concrete realities but only the abstract concept of causal efficacy. Thus we have not left the sphere of thinking and entered the territory of external reality as understood by the Representationalist.

IPK 1.5.10

> It is true that there is manifestation of beings that already exist within the Lord. Otherwise the act of reflexive awareness (*āmarśa*) that is deliberate willing (*icchā*) would not occur [they would not appear unless the Divinity knew them and desired that they be manifest].

IPK 1.5.11

> Reflexive awareness (*vimarśa*) is the essence of manifestation by consciousness. Otherwise the light of consciousness (*prakāśa*) although tinged by the objects would be lifeless like a crystal.
>
> [This is a response to the view that understands consciousness on the model of a searchlight.]

IPK 1.5.12

> That is why one's real identity is consciousness, meaning the acts of awareness and the state of being the agent of conscious acts. By that one is distinguished from the insentient.

IPK 1.5.13

> The act of awareness is reflexive, the repository of all meanings, and spontaneously arising. This is real freedom, the sovereignty of one's ultimate identity.

IPK 1.5.14

It is this that is the vibrancy of consciousness, unconditioned Being unlimited by place or time. This reality is expressed as the essence and the heart of the Divinity.

IPK 1.5.15

By virtue of this he makes himself the objects of awareness. But the field of cognition does not subsist independently of him. If he depended on knowable objects independent of himself, his freedom would cease.

IPK 1.6.1

The reflexive awareness 'I', whose nature is the light of consciousness, although expressed by a word is not a concept (*vikalpa*) because a concept is an act of mental discrimination that presupposes the possibility of affirmation and exclusion, and this awareness has no opposites.

IPK 1.8.1–2

Sometime the Ideas (*ābhāsa*) are grasped in present sensory experience but at other times they do not depend upon present experience, as in the cases of a blind person or in darkness. But there is no difference in the reality of the *Ideas* of objects featuring in thoughts, whether they concern past, present or future.

Abhinavagupta comments: When we say 'I see this *blue* thing' or 'I imagine it' or 'I remember it' or 'I make it', the Idea 'Blue' is essentially uniform. The same applies to the Idea 'Seeing' when 'I *see*' relates to something yellow. The Ideas are joined or separated by the creative divine autonomy. In this way we can make sense of the variety of everyday life in past, present and future.

IPK 1.8.3–4

Even when feelings like pleasure and their occasions are real, and their manifestations are real conscious states, if they belong to the past their external conditions are not given. Still, if feelings are intensely reproduced by imagination then they are felt by the subject as if the past object were present since he experiences the feeling so vividly.

IPK 1.8.5

Externality is not a genuine property of the Ideas about realities and non-beings. Being experienced as external is not the essence of the Ideas. The Ideas, which are internal, always exist [whether some finite subject thinks them or not].

IPK 1.8.7

The Ideas, in so far as they are of the nature of consciousness, always exist within [the trans-individual consciousness]. Given that their manifestations as external are due to the power of *māyā*, they are experienced as external.

IPK 1.8.9

Owing to the will of the Lord, mental representations and feelings of pleasure are manifested as if relating to what is external to consciousness.

IPK 1.8.10

Without the unification of cognitions, there would be no worldly life. The unification of cognitions is based on the unity of trans-individual consciousness. There is one knowing subject common to all [called the Supreme Self].

IPK 1.8.11

It is he only that is the Divinity by virtue of his constant self-awareness and representation of things to himself. Reflexivity (*vimarśa*) is the pure knowledge and action of the deity.

IPK 2.2.1

The concepts ('*buddhayaḥ*', which is glossed as '*satya-ābhāsās*') of action, relation, universal property, individual substance, space and time which apply in the sphere of unity and multiplicity, are considered true because of their permanence and utility.

The theory of Ideas recognizes the categories and the *pramāṇa* framework that are recognized by the realist Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school. Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta accept the validity of their conceptual scheme, as long as it is

construed within the overall framework of Absolute Idealism. This contrasts with the argument of an Absolute Idealist such as F. H. Bradley who says that ordinary concepts such as space, time, causation and personal identity, are ultimately incoherent and do not apply to reality as it really is. This is because we cannot identify them individually due to their relational nature. The contradictions inherent in whatever is posited by ordinary thought show that they are mere appearances and not realities. But the Theory of Ideas recognizes our everyday concepts as valid in that they are contained in and projected by the Divine Mind. They are not merely human conceptual constructs, useful in helping us to find our way around the world. Unity and multiplicity are compatible because Ideas are joined and separated within the all-encompassing divine consciousness.

Abhinavagupta composed a succinct overview of this theology called the *Bodhapañcadaśikā* or *Fifteen Verses on Consciousness.*

> That single principle which is both within and external, whose form is radiance unlimited in light and darkness, that is the Divinity that is the essence of all beings. Its sovereign *śakti* produces entities. [1–2]
>
> The *śakti* does not desire to be different from its possessor. The shared nature of the two is permanent, like that of fire and burning. [3]
>
> This is the deity Bhairava who sustains the cosmos because by his *śakti* he has made everything appear as reflected in his own mirror. [4]
>
> The *śakti* is the transcendent Goddess who delights in contemplating his essence. Her perfect state neither increases nor diminishes in relation to finite beings. [5]
>
> The Divine Omnipotence eternally delighting in play with the Goddess simultaneously dispenses the emanations and reabsorptions of the worlds. [6]
>
> His impossibly difficult unsurpassable activity is total freedom and sovereignty whose nature is consciousness. [7]
>
> The distinctive feature of what is insentient is its being a limited manifestation. Consciousness is other than the insentient by which it is not limited. [8]
>
> The emanations and reabsorptions of the worlds are established as fissions of the autonomous innate *śakti*. [9]
>
> In them there is infinite variety of spheres of experience and their regions, as well as pleasant and unpleasant experiences. [10]

When the unconditioned divine freedom is not understood, there is cycle of birth and death that terrifies the unenlightened. This too is his power. [11]

Divine grace is accessible for one who has gone to a teacher or from scripture. [12]

God-given understanding of the truth is freedom from birth and death, and it is perfection for the enlightened ones. This is known as being liberated while still alive. [13]

Both bondage and freedom proceed from God. They are neither really different from each other, nor different from God. [14]

In this way Bhairava exercising his three-fold *śakti* of will, action and knowing is the true nature of all beings. [15]

Further reading

For the Siddhānta see Sanderson (1992).

Filliozat (1994) translates Sadyojyoti's commentary on the *Svayambhuvāgama*.

For the context of Rāmakaṇṭha's thought about the self, Watson (2006) is valuable.

Goodall (1998) provides a text and lucid translation of the first six chapters of Rāmakaṇṭha's *Kiraṇa Tantra* commentary. The *Mataṅga* commentary is in Bhatt (1977). It has not been translated. Nor has Rāmakaṇṭha's *Nareśvaraparīkṣā-prakāśa*. A (rather doubtful) text is Shastri 1926. Watson (2006) presents a critical version of much of Book 1.

Elaborate arguments for the existence of God were also formulated by Naiyāyikas beginning with Jayanta (850–900 A.D.) They are mentioned in '*Much Ado about Religion*' (Dezső (2005)). By Jayanta's time, personalist theism had long surpassed automatic ritualism as the dominant type of religiosity in many parts of the sub-continent. A useful source here is Krasser (2002) that discusses both Buddhist and Nyāya thought stemming from Dharmakīrti's arguments against an omnipotent and omniscient creator. Also very interesting is Frank Clooney *Hindu God, Christian God.*

For the traditions that we have labelled Śākta, see Sanderson (1985 and 1992) to begin with and move on to Sanderson (1990 and 1995 'Meaning in Tantric Ritual'). Professor Sanderson's preeminence in this field is evident from his 'The Śaiva Exegesis of Kashmir' (2007).

Kṣemarāja's *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam* is in Singh (1982) and his *Śiva Sūtra-vimarṣinī in* Singh (1991).

For Utpaladeva's *Īśvarapratyabhijñākārikā* with the author's own commentary, see the text and translation in Torella (2002). Abhinavagupta' s *Vimarśinī* commentary is in Subramania Iyer and Pandey (1986).

The *Bodhapañcadaśika* is in Shastri (1947).

Chapter III of Kahrs (1998) deals with Kashmiri scriptural exegesis. Padoux (1990) is a classic study of the powers attributed to words in the Hindu traditions.

Questions for discussion and investigation

1. How does the idealism of Utpaladeva and Abhinavagupta differ from the Advaita-Vedānta outlook? Can their views be characterized as theistic?
2. Are the Śaivas' arguments against Buddhism convincing ones?

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